

'A huge learning curve': TAFE practitioners' ways  
of working with private enterprises

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with private enterprises

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The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government, state and territory governments or NCVER

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# Contents

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Tables	4
Acknowledgements	5
Key messages	6
Executive summary	7
Introduction	11
Background and rationale	11
Purpose and objectives	12
Contribution of this research	13
Overview of the literature review	14
Conceptual framework for this research	14
Key issues identified in the literature	15
Methodology	18
Design of the study	18
Data sources and collection	19
Data analysis and reporting	20
Limitations	20
Context: The case studies in brief	21
Case study A	21
Case study B	21
Case study C	21
Case study D	22
Case study E	22
Case study F	23
Key themes and findings	24
Different contexts—different cultures	24
Training and learning within the enterprises	28
TAFE–industry linkages	33
Evolving and expanding roles of the TAFE practitioners	34
Power and control	38
Being responsive and visible	39
Becoming one of them	41
Perspectives on the influence of the TAFE practitioners	41
Conclusions	47
Ways of working	47
‘A huge learning curve’	49
Implications	51
References	55
Support document details	57

# Tables

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1	Summary of perceived culture differences	28
2	Ratings of participants on the effectiveness of the TAFE practitioners in carrying out aspects of their role within the enterprises	45

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# Key messages

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This study explores the roles of technical and further education (TAFE) practitioners working with and within private enterprises. It provides an in-depth analysis of six case studies in Victoria (metropolitan) and South Australia (metropolitan and regional), as well as several pilot interviews in New South Wales.

- ✧ Forming linkages between technical and further education (TAFE) institutes and enterprises depends on the organisations' understanding their respective cultures, ways of operating and priorities. Sustainable linkages depend heavily upon committing the time and energy needed to establish personal relationships between TAFE practitioners and enterprise members.
- ✧ TAFE institutes need to select the 'right' people for collaborative linkages. These practitioners need to become familiar with the enterprise environment, culture and networks rapidly; have, or develop vital skills, such as 'sussing out' what is required; be able to identify skill deficits and options for 'top up' training; be flexible and able to adapt training approaches to the flow of the enterprise's work; work collaboratively in teams of TAFE and enterprise staff; and sensitively customise training methods and materials.
- ✧ Training and learning strategies that are needs-based, just-in-time and very interactive are highly valued approaches to facilitating learning in enterprise-based environments.
- ✧ These workplace-focused approaches require that practitioners work in different ways from those of their colleagues based in institutes. Moreover, these practitioners are under less direct supervision from their managers. These approaches therefore have human resource and industrial relations implications for the institutes concerned, particularly in terms of their responsibilities, and how key performance indicators are framed and monitored.
- ✧ There is still much work to be done in modifying perceptions about policies and practices that work against effective linkages, in educating enterprises and TAFE practitioners about how to implement training packages creatively, and in reducing negative perceptions of TAFE held by industry.



# Executive summary

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## Context

Policy initiatives such as user choice and training packages have been significant contributors in the move towards a more industry-driven vocational education and training (VET) system. An important consequence of this shift has been greater pressure on industries to provide opportunities for training in the workplace, and a reclaiming of the workplace as an authentic site for learning. In effect, vocational learning is increasingly being de-institutionalised, and VET practitioners are being increasingly encouraged to 'get out into industry'. The key issue, therefore, is: In what ways and how effectively do public VET practitioners work with private enterprises?

## Purpose

Given this changing relationship between public VET and private industry, this study explores the roles of technical and further education (TAFE) practitioners working with and within private enterprises. The research objectives were to:

- ❖ identify how TAFE practitioners work with and within enterprises
- ❖ analyse the perceptions of these ways of working held by TAFE managers, TAFE practitioners, enterprise personnel and on-the-job learners
- ❖ evaluate the effectiveness of these ways of working
- ❖ draw implications for how these ways of working may be enhanced.

## Scope

The study involved an in-depth analysis of six case studies in Victoria (metropolitan) and South Australia (metropolitan and regional), as well as several pilot interviews in New South Wales. Each case study comprised a TAFE institute and an enterprise with which there was some form of linkage. In total, 34 interviews were held with four types of participants—TAFE managers, TAFE practitioners, enterprise personnel and workers learning on the job. These participants came from different industries: hospitality (cookery, food and beverage), retail (entertainment), transport and warehousing, wine and automotive (business studies). The case study sites were therefore spread across a number of locations, industries and TAFE institutes, as well as across a range of enterprises, thus providing some diversity. At the same time, the need for compromise because of time, funding and the intensive nature of the research methodology was recognised.

Prior to the establishment of the links between TAFE and the enterprises, each of the companies had some learning arrangements in place. However, these had been haphazard, informal, relatively unsupported and comparatively ineffectual; hence the desire to develop links with an external training provider to make nationally accredited training available, and to provide specialist training and assessment expertise. Moreover, company personnel neither necessarily had time to undertake

training, nor believed it was a core activity. Clearly therefore, an external provider was ideally placed to fulfil this role.

In each of the case studies an external learning arrangement was being introduced which overlaid existing learning systems. While there were tensions in such overlay, and it took time and energy to resolve difficulties and minimise disruptions, the interview data from this study from four different types of participants indicate that the external providers' ways of working contribute significantly to improved learning within these enterprises. For all concerned, TAFE staff and enterprise personnel, the experience of working together constitutes 'a huge learning curve'.

## Key themes and findings

### Different contexts—different cultures

Perceived differences in culture between enterprises and TAFE institutes were often cited by interviewees. Regarding TAFE, these include: bureaucratic procedures; slowness to respond; lack of knowledge of what practitioners are doing out in industry; a feeling of loss of control on the part of TAFE managers; old technology; and classroom-oriented teaching methods. Regarding industry, the following factors were cited: a lack of knowledge about how training packages work; poor relationships between managers and workers; a tendency to leave training to the external provider; and communication problems between TAFE, the company, the learner and the New Apprenticeships Centre.

### Training and learning within the enterprises

There is increasing recognition of the importance of formal training and of instilling in workers the need for ongoing learning. The learning most valued in companies is informal learning on the job from work colleagues. For reasons of relevance, convenience and cost, the preference is for in-house training. Managers' views of learning were not particularly positive initially, but became more so as the benefits of linkage arrangements became clearer. Similarly, the workers' views of learning were less than favourable at the start, but many also became more enthusiastic as the benefits became apparent. Many, however, remained unengaged or reluctant learners.

### TAFE–industry linkages

Types of TAFE–industry linkages are heavily dependent on personal relationships. As one TAFE manager insightfully expressed it, 'The shades of what arrangements you can come to are only varied by the nature of people's arrangements with each other'. In this study various types of arrangements have been established. The most common arrangement is where an individual works with an enterprise for a certain number of days or sessions a week. Another model is where a TAFE practitioner is almost totally based within an organisation. A further model, practised very effectively in one case study, is where a group of TAFE practitioners work collaboratively with a group of enterprise trainers.

These case studies were, by definition, examples of TAFE being responsive to industry training needs. They showed this in various ways: negotiating the what, when, how of training; taking on different roles within enterprises; and customising materials, assessment criteria and training methods to the needs of the company.

There is no doubt that there is considerable learning to be done by everyone involved. The TAFE practitioner needs to learn about company environment and culture, that linkages take time and energy, and that timing of learning can often not be determined by them. The TAFE practitioner needs to be flexible and patient, to change methodologies, to customise materials and to listen to enterprise needs. For their part, enterprise staff also need to learn that training can be an

investment, that accredited training is important, that gaining a certificate for learning is worthwhile, and to be patient with TAFE procedures.

## Expanding roles of TAFE practitioners

The evidence strongly suggests that the roles of TAFE practitioners are evolving and expanding. Apart from the more conventional roles of development, delivery and assessment, TAFE practitioners enlarge horizons and add value by providing a bigger picture beyond any single company. They also provide valuable support both to managers and to workers, and link enterprises and TAFE. They act as employment brokers, as coordinators between companies and New Apprenticeships Centres, as consultants to the managers, and as coaches to the learners on the job.

The most valued characteristics that enable TAFE practitioners to be effective in these roles are seen to be their industry background and their ability to fit in with regular work patterns without disrupting the natural flow of work. Their passion and other interpersonal qualities are also evident, along with their ability to identify and fill needs, to form close relationships with their clients, and their willingness to learn.

As a consequence of close working arrangements with the enterprises, and increasingly spending more time there than in their institutes, TAFE practitioners become closely affiliated with the enterprise to which they are linked. They often come, therefore, to be identified and even named almost as one of the company staff. This is expressed in various ways, such as: 'I feel like I'm actually part of the site, that I'm not external', and 'now part of their furniture'. These close affiliations with the companies, however, have repercussions in the institutes, where some managers acknowledge feelings of loss of control over their practitioner.

## Perspectives on the influence of the TAFE practitioners

The various types of interviewees expressed different views on the impact of the TAFE practitioners, but all were favourable. Enterprise staff saw benefits in these linkages, particularly because of established TAFE infrastructure, processes and credibility, the degree of preparation that practitioners had undertaken for their workplace assignments, and their value as 'learning resources'. Learners appreciated their helpfulness, up-to-date information, sharing of personal experiences, explanations, personal attributes and dedication. Ratings on a number of functions were all high, with those relating to assessment being particularly high. The data indicated that the TAFE practitioners were appreciated by their industry counterparts in training.

## Conclusions

The ways that TAFE practitioners involved in this study work with and within enterprises can be summarised as including one or more of the following six main roles:

- ❖ bearers of glad tidings: injecting new dimensions in learning arrangements in companies
- ❖ raisers of standards: sharpening and focusing the training as the acknowledged training experts
- ❖ builders of learning culture: serving not only as content trainers, but fulfilling many functions that help to build culture
- ❖ coaches of learning: working one to one, adding value
- ❖ bridges between TAFE and industry: serving to link different cultures for the benefit of both, able to do so because of their often unique backgrounds and experiences
- ❖ models of learning: acting as examples of learners, thereby enhancing their credibility, and modelling lifelong learning.

The report concludes with a consideration of the implications of TAFE–enterprise collaborations for VET managers and practitioners, for company personnel and for policy-makers.

## Limitations

In interpreting the findings, there are two main limitations to this study. First, the case study approach to research is not without its confined boundaries, and is necessarily restricted in its generalisability. It is also largely without a strong theoretical base. Second, the number of completed interviews, particularly in enterprises, was fewer than had been intended. It was extremely difficult to obtain further interviews, for reasons of limited knowledge about the TAFE practitioners' work on site and problems in sudden cancellation of pre-arranged interviews because of work pressures at sites.

# Introduction

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## Background and rationale

While there has been considerable debate about the key features of training reform, one prime effect has been a shift in power away from training institutions (the 'supply side') towards industry (the 'demand side'). The reform has often been labelled 'industry-driven'. For example, a key policy initiative such as user choice has meant that employers can choose their preferred registered training provider and negotiate aspects of training, such as location, timing and mode of delivery. In addition, training, if it is to be accredited, must deliver competencies specified in national competency standards within training packages which have been developed by industry parties. This swing from a supply- to a demand-led training system is very significant, and underlies many of the key issues in training reform.

An important consequence of this shift has been greater pressure on industries to provide opportunities for training in the workplace and a reclaiming of the workplace as an authentic site for learning. In effect, vocational learning is increasingly being de-institutionalised, and vocational education and training (VET) practitioners are being increasingly encouraged to 'get out into industry'. While both the workplace trainer and the regular worker-trainer are assuming an increasingly critical position in the provision of training opportunities (Harris, Simons & Bone 2000), so indeed is the public VET practitioner in this move to de-institutionalise learning.

Training reform has fundamentally transformed VET's orientation from education to business and service (Office of Technical and Further Education 1998), and shifted the VET practitioner along a continuum, from an emphasis on teaching and creating curriculum, more towards entrepreneurial brokering and delivery of competencies within training packages. Practitioners working in the public VET system are increasingly involved in arrangements where their services are 'sold' to meet a variety of training needs in local industry and in overseas countries.

User choice has fostered increasing responsiveness among registered training organisations. The technical and further education (TAFE) institutes in particular have long been conditioned to the Kangan (1974) philosophy of emphasis on the individual and the importance of lifelong education, and over the years have become accustomed to their growing stature within the educational structures of Australia since the subsuming, from the late 1980s, of (old) institutes of technology within the higher education sector. The TAFE institutes have thus adopted by default the territory between schooling and higher education, with some even labelling themselves as (new) institutes of technology. Many had come to see themselves as educational institutions to which students came knocking on the door. Thus, the shift in policy from supply to demand has created, in many cases, a tension for such institutions and staff who perceive themselves in this way. The clarion call to be industry-driven has been a difficult re-awakening for many staff—a huge learning curve. Emerging from technological ivory towers and being responsive to industry has been for many a difficult transition. Others have embraced it with enthusiasm, seeing new possibilities and vistas.

Training packages have further promoted this shift. These packages require, more explicitly than was ever previously the case, adherence to industry-developed competency standards and assessment within the workplace context, and have led to some innovative approaches to learning and assessment (Meyers et al. 2003). The demise of curriculum, in name, but certainly not in actual

practice, reinforced the shift towards the de-institutionalisation of learning and assessment, and the concomitant rise in interest in what these processes involved in workplaces, and how they were to be accomplished.

Such changes have resulted in a fundamental shift in the very notion of a VET practitioner—their roles and mindsets (Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005), their sense of identity (Chappell & Johnston 2003) and their professional development needs and practices (Harris et al. 2001). For example, VET research priorities have noted recently that VET practitioners are now expected to have a wider range of skills, knowledge, understanding and aptitudes, as their role has expanded to include mentoring, industry training brokerage and assessment in the workplace, in addition to facilitating and supporting learning.

The implementation of training packages is a particularly significant reform, in that it not only includes targeting the way in which training is designed, implemented and delivered, but it also challenges established relationships between training providers and the industries they serve. At the heart of this reform lies a challenge to VET practitioners' attitudes, values and beliefs about their relationship with the industries they work with, and their conceptions of the roles they have to play in acting as 'change agents' to realise policy outcomes mandated by government (Stewart 2000; Van Leeuwen 2000; Owers 2001; Simons 2001).

One of the main aims in implementing training packages has been to 'close the loop' between the outcomes of training as defined by industry, and the outcomes of training programs as delivered by registered training organisations (Scollay 2000). Training packages thus provide both the framework and the opportunity for training providers and enterprises to work together to develop a range of responsive and flexible learning pathways (Australian Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Reference Committee 2000).

*The key issue, then, is: In what ways and how effectively do public VET practitioners work with private enterprises?*

This issue is all the more fascinating when one recalls that a great many VET practitioners left industry to become teachers in educational institutions and are now being exhorted to return in a different capacity. What effect does that have on their attitudes towards and ways of working with industry? How and to what extent are the cultures different and how do VET practitioners reconcile them?

## Purpose and objectives

This study examines the ways in which public VET practitioners work with and within industry. Studying the impact of *external* actors (namely, VET practitioners) on work and learning environments builds upon the work of Schofield (2000a, 2000b) and Strickland et al. (2001) relating to the quality of training and the nature of workplaces as sites for learning, as well as upon the previous work of Harris, Simons and Bone (2000) on rethinking the roles of workplace trainers as *internal* actors.

Given the changing relationship between public VET and private industry, manifested particularly in the implementation of training packages and user choice, this study aimed to explore the roles of TAFE practitioners in working with private enterprises and to examine ways in which their ways of working may be made more effective.

Thus, the key objectives of the study were to:

- ✧ identify how TAFE practitioners work with and within enterprises
- ✧ analyse the perceptions of these ways of working held by the TAFE managers, TAFE practitioners, enterprise personnel and learners on the job

- ❖ evaluate the effectiveness of these ways of working
- ❖ draw implications for how these ways of working may be enhanced.

The outcome of this study is an in-depth analysis of how public VET practitioners work with and within private enterprises, how these ways of working are conceptualised and constructed by the various actors, and how these ways of working might be enhanced.

## Contribution of this research

Despite the push for institutional practitioners in VET to work with industry, little is yet known in Australia about how they work with private enterprises and their effectiveness in accommodating their work within another work culture. More is known about how industry personnel work within TAFE institutes as sessional staff than about how TAFE practitioners work in and with enterprises. How they do greatly impacts upon the strength of relationships and the effectiveness in delivering quality vocational education and training. In this way, the project has considerable *practical value* to the VET sector.

This project also contributes to the growing body of knowledge and understanding about the ways in which learning occurs in Australian enterprises, and the roles of public VET practitioners in facilitating that learning. In doing this, the project provides further illumination on the so far rather meagre research literature on the implementation of training packages. It contributes to knowledge relating to the potential for training packages and user choice to act as vehicles for promoting quality and flexibility in VET teaching and learning. Thus, the project not only has practical value, but also provides information that may help to *inform policy-making* in the VET sector.

# Overview of the literature review

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## Conceptual framework for this research

The roles of VET practitioners in working with industry may be very usefully probed using valuable insights from learning network theory. This theory provides an alternative perspective on work-related learning and which is useful in describing both how learning is organised and how learning and work are related (Poell et al. 2000, p.42). What is helpful is that it draws most heavily on disciplines of sociology and cultural anthropology (Poell et al. 2000, p.43), two of the perspectives of the six identified by Easterby-Smith (1997). For his part, Easterby-Smith believes that these two perspectives are the most under-represented in the field and to which more attention would be beneficial. Certainly in Australia, much of the research work in this area thus far has been heavily dependent on psychology and organisation development.

Learning network theory holds that an enterprise is made up of a series of networks, which correspond to the main functions the enterprise needs to undertake in order to remain viable. In understanding learning in the workplace, two networks are of particular importance—the *learning network* and the *work network* (Van der Krogt 1998). Work networks evolve out of the ways in which workers interact with policies, organise and work within an enterprise. Work networks are also shaped by the nature of the work and the relationships and climate created by the interactions of the workers within the enterprise. Similarly, learning networks comprise the results of workers acting on policies and planning and developing ways of recognising the learning that takes place. Both learning and work networks are created and re-created over time.

Different types of organisations are characterised by different learning and work networks. Within different types of enterprises, certain forms of work pattern are dominant. A work pattern is visible in the way work is undertaken and is constructed over time by the actors in the network. In a similar way, key workers (actors) shape the structure of the learning processes and create a learning network. Examining the nature of the learning that takes place in enterprises, Van der Krogt (1998) identified four different types of learning systems:

- ❖ Self-initiated learning systems allow the learner the freedom to organise their learning.
- ❖ Vertical learning systems encompass learning underpinned by structural supports inside enterprises, such as needs analyses, training plans, use of trainers, human resource departments etc.
- ❖ Horizontal learning systems emphasise learning that occurs where people establish groups as a basis for implementing learning programs.
- ❖ External learning systems emphasise learning that is predominantly driven by external contacts.

It is the fourth type of learning system—in this case, the involvement of VET practitioners—that has been the focus of this study. Learning network theory posits that these learning systems are ‘held in tension’ with each other—it recognises that tension will always exist between the needs and learning goals of the individual and those of the enterprise, and between the learning networks and the work networks.



## Key issues identified in the literature

The literature review in appendix A provides a backdrop for this study from published sources, and asks a range of questions about the changing roles and capabilities of VET practitioners in a rapidly changing environment. Appendices A to E can be found in the support document at NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>. Distilled from this review are a number of key issues, summarised below, which highlight the areas most problematic in, and/or particularly pertinent to, this examination of ways in which VET practitioners work with and within private enterprise.

The literature concerning the involvement of VET practitioners in industry settings covers a wide field of topics, but only some, a relatively small proportion, deal specifically with the impact these practitioners have had and how they are viewed by industry managers, workers and learners on the job. As external consultants, how do VET practitioners establish new learning networks within enterprises, how are they responsible for disrupting existing ones and how much are they absorbed into existing networks? Also, how do learning networks and work networks interact and what is the VET practitioner's role in such interaction?

### VET practitioners forming and influencing linkages with workplaces

Some authors suggest that, for workplace training to be successful, there needs to be a radical re-organisation of the workplace (Field & Mawer 1998). VET practitioners can play a critical role in any such rethinking of workplace organisation (Dawe 2003; Billett 1999, 2001). The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) in *What makes for good workplace learning?* suggests that:

Learning in the workplace is not just something that happens, but is part of a wider system. This system consists of the enterprise and its managers, the individual, the external training provider, and other organisations such as government and community bodies. There is a change in thinking about how these various elements view each other. Rather than being discrete, the various elements form networks and even become partners. Within a systemic approach, it is the networks and partnership arrangements that are of crucial importance.

(NCVER 2003, p.8)

Thus the ingredients for effective workplace learning include not only a changed work organisation but a network of individuals and agencies working cooperatively with the VET practitioner, a pivotal member in any such partnership.

Are VET practitioners currently filling this role? Do they see themselves in this role and do employers accept that this is a legitimate function for VET practitioners? Robinson (2000) found that, while industry was well organised in its development of a united approach to VET policy in its dealings with government and VET providers, there was a need for improved local-level relationships between industry and VET providers, and claimed that, in Australia, this is the least developed area.

### VET practitioners working in different ways

The actual roles of VET practitioners in this new working environment with its different expectations and emphases have been and still are evolving. Practitioners are being asked to work in different ways and to undertake new roles and responsibilities, and these are additional to the traditional 'teaching' role and are also substantially different in terms of focus, purpose and practice (Chappell & Johnston 2003, pp.5, 8).

The activity of TAFE practitioners working with enterprises, however, is not without its issues. Misko (2001, p.33), for example, reported concerns about the customising of training programs to meet employer needs and how this may limit the learner's ability to transfer to different workplaces. Favero (2003) also found such issues included: meeting the demands of regulatory compliance,

funding and concerns about the provision of transferable skills, reluctance of some employers to release trainees for training, the time taken to travel to workplaces, concerns about funding, and changes to the roles of TAFE teachers (particularly the expansion of administrative tasks).

The evolutionary shift from a teaching to a consulting focus is further elaborated by authors to consist of more than a simple change in emphasis in what VET practitioners do. It entails a change in who they are and how they relate to employers, on-the-job learners and other stakeholders in the VET arena. A common feature in commentaries on these new ways of working being constructed for practitioners in contemporary education and training sites (Ainley & Bailey 1997; Farrell 2000; Chappell 2001; Seddon 2000; Chappell & Johnston 2003) tends to be that when:

... education and training practitioners are asked to do things 'differently' in their everyday practices, they are being called on to become different practitioners; that is, to have different understandings of their role in education and training, to have different relationships with learners, to conceptualise their professional and vocational knowledge differently, to alter their relationship with their organisation, to change their understanding of who they are in the new education and training landscape. In short, to change their identity at work.

(Chappell & Johnston 2003, p.8)

VET practitioners can therefore serve as links between the world of learning and the world of work. They have to develop a new role which, above all, requires the establishment of relationships and the development of a learning environment, both of which are viewed positively within a working environment.

It seems that VET practitioners and their industrial counterparts are clear about the body of knowledge that forms part of the learning network, and they generally develop functional linkages based on mutual respect and trust. However, these linkages tend not to reach their full potential due to lack of the required time and resources. So how do VET practitioners deal with this issue in their work with private enterprises where learning networks inevitably exist in tension with work networks?

## VET practitioners dealing with tensions between learning and work

There is evidence that VET practitioners are respected for their knowledge, both of the training content and the training context. They are also respected for their skills in training, something that their enterprise partners acknowledge that industrial personnel do not necessarily have (Dumbrell 2003; Smith, E 1999). VET practitioners are also acknowledged for their expertise in developing relationships and providing a personalised service to employers.

Where criticism of VET practitioners is reported, it generally focuses on how their involvement interferes with the running of business; that is, where introduced learning networks interface with existing work networks. Some VET providers remark that conflict is often caused by external factors such as government pressure to meet other policy objectives. Other pressures stem from lack of acceptance by some employers that trainees are learners and not merely subsidised employees, and from communication problems caused by frequent changes in training personnel (Dumbrell 2003).

Networks are particularly important in the functioning of small businesses, and VET practitioners can play a major role in the establishment and development of these networks (Kearns 2002, 2003). Although the formation of networks is valuable, and although VET practitioners (at least the successful ones) are seen as adept at developing learning networks, there are frequently impediments to this process. Some of these impediments stem from workplaces and some from how VET practitioners operate and are perceived in industry. A critical factor in the formation of learning networks in workplaces is the interaction between such networks and the work networks. Workplace learning activities are sometimes seen as impediments to the smooth operation of work, but they can also be seen as having a positive influence on productivity (Blandy et al. 2000;

NCVER 2001; Smith, A 2001), although many senior managers in industry are still not convinced about returns on investment in training in their companies (Callan & Ashworth 2004, p.49).

## Characteristics of VET practitioners working in industry

A number of writers have investigated the distinguishing characteristics among exemplary trainers in business and industry (for example, Leach 1996; Field & Mawer 1998). They tend particularly to emphasise interactive, supportive and mentoring types of skills, and understanding the workplace, negotiating skills and networking skills often feature prominently. VET practitioners working with and within industry also require these types of skills and possibly others as well. The literature highlights the importance of the workplace as a place for learning in doing (Praetz 2001), suggesting that workplace learning includes a significant amount of informal learning (for example, Garrick 1998; Boud & Middleton 2003) and that there is an interrelationship between learning and work (Harris, Simons & Bone 2000; NCVER 2003). Thus mentoring skills and 'getting alongside' skills appear to be essential for VET practitioners, although such relationship issues for those VET practitioners working with enterprises are made more complex due to the inherent tensions between the needs of enterprises and the needs of learners (Strickland et al. 2001).

Santoro (2002) provides a useful insight into the perceptions of some VET providers, arguing that there is considerable resistance to what some providers believe is a 'dumbing down' of their educational role from 'teacher' to 'trainer'. She suggests that:

The trainers, and especially the teachers in this study, are 'locked' into narrow understandings of what constitutes training and teaching and who can do either. They represent themselves in particular ways, identifying as one or the other. However, in effect, they continually cross boundaries between teaching and training, taking up positions within each of these discourses at different times, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously. (Santoro 2002, p.10)

Clearly, for the VET practitioner to be effective in the workplace learning environment, there needs to be a working through of this position.

## The positioning of VET practitioners in workplaces

These inherent tensions within workplaces have been highlighted in learning network theory. VET practitioners are just *one* group of actors in learning networks. From the point of view of workplace learning, they are *external*—'outsiders'. However, it may well be that such demarcation between external and internal may be becoming less rigid. Callan and Ashworth (2004), for instance, found that both industry and VET providers were instrumental in initiating linkages, that VET providers were involved in a range of activities within organisations, not just training, and that they were expected to build partnerships both with other industries and key instrumentalities. VET practitioners may increasingly be seen both as external to an enterprise and as a representative of that organisation. As such, VET practitioners can play a critical part on the stage of learning within companies and in managing the tensions inherent in this dual position, a position that provides both many challenges and many possibilities.

# Methodology

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## Design of the study

The project was undertaken in three stages—Stage 1: Preparation for data collection; Stage 2: Data collection and analysis; and Phase 3: Development of the final report.

An interpretive approach was used to address the research objectives. This kind of approach is based on the view that people socially and symbolically construct their own organisational realities (Berger & Luckman 1967). It construes knowledge as being gained through social constructions such as language, shared meanings and documents. Thus the individual is cast as ‘a central actor in a drama of personal meaning making’ (Fenwick 2001, p.9). In this way, individuals are understood to construct their own knowledge through interaction with environments (constructivism). The participant reflects on lived experience, then interprets and generalises this experience. In this constructivist view, individuals are presumed to interpret their worlds actively, and create their own knowledge through different processes of reflection.

More particularly, the project involved the researchers being at the sites shadowing and conducting in-depth interviews, as well as examining documentation. Full understanding of the intricate dynamics of these relationships and ways of working required a semi-ethnographic approach. The aim of the interviews was to elicit participants’ views and experiences in their own terms rather than to collect data that are simply a selection from among pre-set survey responses. The researchers in this way used the natural settings as the direct source of information, and the responses then allowed the researchers to analyse meaningful data grounded in the actual experiences, needs and concerns of participants.

This project employed a case study approach. A case study utilises semi-ethnographic methods to obtain and portray a ‘rich’ descriptive account of meanings and experiences of people in an identified social setting. For example, Murray and Lawrence defined it as:

A detailed analysis of singularities: a person, an event limited in time, a specific department within a larger organization, a particular form of occupational practice, an administrative subsystem, or a single institution within clearly defined boundaries.

(Murray & Lawrence 2000, p.13)

Similarly, Mark (2004, p.207) claims that a case study is ‘the study of a unique event or action shaped by those who are the participants in the situation’. Both of these definitions emphasise a focused dimension, one which was deemed most appropriate for this study’s goal of analysing practitioners’ ways of working with enterprises. It also appeared to be the most apposite approach for this project from the viewpoints of matching method to research objectives, portraying ways of working in discrete settings and understanding different actors’ viewpoints. Use of interviews and case studies rather than survey research was recommended by Callan and Ashworth (2004, p.61) for further research in this area because these methodologies would provide a ‘more suitable method for examining the complex and changing nature of ... training partnerships than did [their] structured and anonymous survey’.

## Data sources and collection

The research concentrated on a range of industries—hospitality (cookery; food and beverage), retail (entertainment), transport and warehousing, wine and automotive (business studies). These industries were chosen because they represent a blend of traditional and emerging industries, and because they were likely to exhibit different organisational characteristics. A number of visits were made to TAFE institutes and industries in Sydney, where the interview schedules were piloted and the researchers learnt more about the nature of TAFE–industry linkages.

The main study involved six case studies, three Victorian and three South Australian, each comprising a TAFE school and an enterprise with which there was some form of linkage. Two TAFE institutes in Victoria (both metropolitan) and two in South Australia (one metropolitan, one regional) were invited to nominate one or two practitioners who worked with a private enterprise; those enterprises with which the TAFE institute had some kind of a partnership were also invited to participate in the study. The case study sites were therefore spread across a number of locations, industries and TAFE institutes, as well as across a range of enterprises, thus providing some diversity, while recognising the need for compromise because of time, funding and the intensive nature of the research methodology.

Contact was firstly made with the directors of the TAFE institutes to introduce the study and to gain their consent for participation. They generally referred the project on to educational managers, who were asked to identify a TAFE practitioner who was working with a private enterprise. The TAFE managers and practitioners were invited to participate by means of an interview. Once this had been established, an information sheet and a consent form were sent to each person to formalise their participation in the study and to confirm arrangements for the interviews. A similar process was used to seek participation from the enterprises; in particular, the participation of those who were most familiar with the modus operandi of the TAFE practitioners; namely, training staff and learners on the job. In this way, the research was made more robust through the triangulation of data sources.

From a review of the published literature of relevance to this project (see appendix A in the support document at NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>) and from previous research experiences, data collection instruments were drafted and checked by all of the research team. Four interview schedules were developed for the different types of participant (see appendix B in the support document). Prior to data collection, an ethics protocol was developed and ethics approval was obtained from the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee.

In the pilot study in Sydney, eight interviews were held with four TAFE practitioners and three TAFE managers from three different TAFE institutes, and with one company member. Five were male and three were female.

In the main study in Victoria and South Australia, interviews were held within institute schools with TAFE practitioners and TAFE managers, and wherever possible within enterprises, with company members (in training or management) and on-the-job learners in contact with the TAFE practitioner. All of these interviews were conducted face to face during visits to the sites. Within the six different TAFE schools, six TAFE practitioners and five TAFE managers of those practitioners were interviewed. Within the six enterprises, interviews were held with seven company members and eight learners (as well as a number of more informal conversations, as distinct from interviews, with several other learners). In this phase of the research, 14 interviews were with males and 12 with females. Thus a total of 34 interviews were completed over the course of the study.

The interviews that were successfully completed were audio-taped (with the permission of the participants) and transcribed into a thick file of rich text. In addition, summaries of the visits and interviews were made using field notes, and from these, descriptions were developed of each of the

six case studies (these are briefly sketched in the next section, and are provided in more detail in appendix C in the support document).

## Data analysis and reporting

Working with words can be a problem in qualitative research because words are 'fatter' than numbers and usually have multiple meanings (Miles & Huberman 1994, p.56). However, as these authors highlight, words or instances provide a rich description of events and people and can render more meaning than numbers alone. The interview data were clustered, involving the segmenting of the data into units, and then re-arranged into categories that facilitated insight and comparison (Miles & Huberman 1994, p.58).

Included in the interview texts were ratings obtained, wherever possible, in an attempt to quantify particular aspects of the role of the TAFE practitioners. In instances where pairs of learners were interviewed, the rating was discussed and agreed to by the pair in question. All these data were summarised in tabular form to provide an additional dimension to the analysis of the interview texts (table 2 is in the text; tables 3 to 10 are presented in appendix D in the support document). In addition, tables presenting helps, hindrances and strategies were compiled and these are provided in appendix E in the support document.

In the reporting of text from the interview transcriptions and the field notes, the case studies have been allocated a letter from A to F to preserve the researchers' commitment to organisational anonymity. Similarly, in the interest of confidentiality, the interviewees are referenced in this report only as TAFE managers, TAFE practitioners, company managers, company members or on-the-job learners, rather than by their actual titles. All page references relate to the actual page number in the 254-page file of field notes and interview transcriptions in order to document thoroughly the audit trail.

## Limitations

The case study approach to research is not without its restrictions. At first glance the case study may appear simple to conduct. However, a major pitfall is that it can expand to include almost everything, and not be clearly defined and within ascribed boundaries. Another is that it is 'largely a-theoretical' (Connole, Smith & Wiseman 1993, p.137). Moreover, rich portrayal requires the collection of 'robust' data, which in turn dictates that the researcher possess the high-level skills necessary for identifying diverse sources of data, employing appropriate methods to gather the data and then reporting the case in an appropriate manner. And finally, there is the most common and most recognised issue of generalisability.

The number of completed interviews, particularly in enterprises, was less than had been hoped for. There was one TAFE manager missing, because of lack of knowledge about what the TAFE practitioner did in the enterprise. Within enterprises, it was extremely difficult to obtain further interviews; generally there was only one person in each enterprise who was responsible for and knew enough about the TAFE practitioner's work on site to feel comfortable about being interviewed. Several interviews in the enterprises arranged before the visits, especially with on-the-job learners, were cancelled at the last moment because of work pressures at the site. At one site, for example, the learners were alleged to be too busy cramming training into a heavy work schedule to spend time out with an interviewer. At another enterprise, appointments had to be suddenly cancelled due to a rush order on the factory floor, and the enterprise found it too difficult to reschedule the interviews. At yet another, an industrial emergency at the site on the afternoon of the researcher's visit made it impossible for the workers to be absent from their allocated duties.

# Context: The case studies in brief

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This section of the report briefly outlines the organisations and the training in the six case studies as context for the analysis of the key findings emerging from the interviews. More detailed information on the linking institutions, the training, key players' perspectives and the main issues at each site is provided in appendix C.

## Case study A

The enterprise is a large wine-making conglomerate, spread across a number of locations. The actual case study site employs approximately 400 staff. The company had developed an established workplace training program through the industry training packages. The decision to enter into an industry-TAFE training liaison program, however, followed acknowledgement by the company that staff needed recognition, as well as accreditation for the training they were undertaking and the new skills they were acquiring.

The TAFE organisation is a regional institute encompassing a number of widely spread campuses across various rural centres. This institute's involvement with situated training at industrial and commercial sites is a relatively recent innovation for them, but has resulted in a number of liaison programs. The TAFE practitioner began accreditation programs with the company approximately 12 months ago, following detailed negotiations.

## Case study B

The enterprise is a large and geographically fragmented industrial complex in a metropolitan suburb. The plant is involved in the design, development and manufacture of rubber and plastics components for the automotive industry in general, as well as products for the building, construction and marine industries. The company employs approximately 450 workers, of whom approximately three-quarters are from a non-English speaking background.

The TAFE institute is a large multi-campus establishment, and spreads over metropolitan as well as regional areas. Each of its campuses and learning centres provides the local community and industry with vocational education services. The institute provides training for employers and businesses via traineeships and apprenticeships and customised courses to meet specific needs.

Over the past five years, the training emphasis has gradually been redirected towards a multi-faceted approach to learning. Industry skills are stressed, but there is also importance placed on lifelong learning that encompasses literacy, numeracy and computer skills, together with offerings such as preparedness for retirement.

## Case study C

Situated in a regional centre, this hotel complex is owned by the local community and comprises a number of bars, restaurants, accommodation and gaming facilities. The company has a virtual

monopoly on the entertainment side of life in the area and is a significant employer within the wider region.

The TAFE institute caters for a geographically large area. The pertinent course is a one-semester combination of certificates II and III in hospitality, and is intended to offer a broad introduction to the industry, covering food, drink, service and presentation. Approximately a third of the learners on this course are employed by the enterprise being considered. Most of the hospitality training conducted by this TAFE institute is performed in-house with a small amount being undertaken, when requested or relevant, at a worksite. A feature of the training is the willingness of the institute to adapt existing courses to suit the needs of the industry worksite. Another feature is the close and lasting rapport between trainers and learners.

## Case study D

The enterprise is a large suburban hotel and entertainment complex in a capital city. It comprises a number of bars, gaming rooms and restaurants, along with a small motel. The enterprise employs in excess of 80 staff, most of whom are rostered on a casual basis. Most of the staff live locally and many use their casual employment to subsidise their tertiary studies.

The TAFE institute is a multi-purpose institution, with four main campuses located in a city. It has more than 33 000 student enrolments each year. It strives to develop, form and nurture industry partnerships, and has a long history of working with industry. The liaison between the enterprise and the TAFE institute has been formulated through the Hospitality and Tourism Studies Department.

Prior to the company's liaison with TAFE early in 2001, training at the worksite was performed by section managers on an ad hoc basis, where and when needed. From the point of view of TAFE operations, the company has chosen to adopt a 'traineeship plus' scheme. The program is largely self-paced, with trainees expected to attend periodic seminars at the worksite. TAFE offers the program to the company, with the government funding subsidies available to employers who choose to put all their staff through this type of accredited training.

## Case study E

The enterprise is a cinema group which employs over 1300 staff across 17 sites in a capital city. The site under consideration is the head office of the group and is situated in a large new shopping and entertainment complex. Staff based at this location comprise head office personnel, including the Training and Development Section, departmental managers and workers for the 11 cinemas at the site, 90% of whom are tertiary students and who are employed on a casual basis.

The TAFE institute is a multi-discipline organisation, based in a suburb of a capital city. With more than 24 000 students across six main campuses, the institute provides industry-designed, nationally accredited vocational training for a broad range of occupations.

Prior to the liaison between the company and TAFE, the only in-house training at the site was undertaken informally and incidentally by section managers. An ad hoc buddy system also operated. The employment of a new human resources director early in 2002 led to the introduction of the concept of accredited training for staff because of the funding available in this area. Initially designed to cater for approximately 200 staff, the acceptance of the training promoted to staff has expanded exponentially to the point where, midway through 2003, 930 staff were participating voluntarily in the courses.



## Case study F

The enterprise is a large wholesale distributor which is part of a multi-national paper manufacturing conglomerate. It conducts its operations in an outer metropolitan suburb, and contracts some of its training in the warehousing and transport area to the TAFE institute.

The TAFE institute is the same as that in case study D. The liaison between the enterprise and TAFE has been formulated through the TAFE institute's Transport Studies Department.

TAFE on-site training has been undertaken with the company for the past three years. TAFE was selected to provide specialised training because of its flexible approach, along with the fact that a trainer could be placed within the working environment to supply specific work skill training at the worksite when needed. The experiment has proved successful, in that company management has become aware of the need for continuous worker training to maximise efficiency and therefore profits.

# Key themes and findings

This report is not primarily focused on the nature of the partnerships between TAFE providers and industry, nor is it so closely concerned with the establishment and management of large training partnerships, as was the study of Callan and Ashworth (2004), nor with how social partnerships might be relevant to the VET sector, as was the study of Seddon and Billett (2004). Rather, its emphasis is on *ways of working*—how TAFE practitioners work with and within private enterprises. It thus provides qualitatively rich detail and thick description, using as much as possible the voices of those involved as a microcosmic complement to these other studies. To this end, the next section outlines the key themes and findings from content analysis of the interviews and field notes.

## Different contexts—different cultures

Critical to VET practitioners working with private industry are the perceptions of the differing cultural contexts of each, since the cultures of each are markedly different. Consequently, the VET practitioners had to come to an understanding quickly of the perceived differences and how to cope with them.

The most widespread perception of TAFE was that it was a bureaucratic machine. In one instance, TAFE was referred to as ‘the actual big TAFE ... machine’ (A, 33) and ‘[t]hat monster in the background that’s really frustrating to deal with’ (A, 40), while in another, paperwork was singled out as the root of intense frustration.

I can get frustrated with the bureaucracy of the TAFE and I get you know, really, really frustrated at the amount of paperwork that needs to be generated, this constant paper trail of signatures and double and triple checking things, and you know, we just don’t operate like that in this business. (E, 189)

Some of the TAFE staff acknowledged this themselves, admitting that some of their processes were ‘highly bureaucratic’ (A, 65). ‘Huge contrasts’ (A, 59), said one, ‘... significant potential clashes because many of our ... industry clients see us as very bureaucratic’ (A, 59). The use of the student management system database, enrolment forms applied on a calendar basis, parchment application and procedures and ‘all sorts of things that literally drive our industry clients crazy’ (A, 65) were cited as examples. These perceptions relating to the demands of regulatory compliance have also been cited by TAFE practitioners in many other studies (for example, Favero 2003; Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005).

Another commonly perceived problem with TAFE was its lack of responsiveness: ‘The machine doesn’t cope well with anything out of the ordinary’ (A, 33). TAFE’s culture was contrasted with industry culture in terms of its more rapid reaction to change and its greater flexibility.

I think [the company] is an incredibly reactive company and everybody who works in it is very used to the rules changing at the last second and they’re very used to being flexible, we’re forced to be flexible ... and we actually pride ourselves on, you know, changing things and pushing the boundaries and doing things differently and stepping in where angels fear to tread. That’s probably the opposite to how a TAFE would operate, so I imagine that the

TAFE people sometimes feel their hair standing on end about the way that we do things around here. (E, 189)

One of the key reasons for this, apart from bureaucracy, was seen to be its dependency on a restricted number of staff who understood the industrial context.

TAFE ... doesn't cope well with anything out of the ordinary, it just relies on a couple of people in there to understand what we want and be able to do it, and if those couple of people weren't there, we wouldn't be able to do what we do. (A, 33)

In particular, this problem referred to a lack of supportive managers who were sufficiently knowledgeable of industry contexts and therefore able to comprehend the types of staff development that a TAFE trainer would need to be able to work effectively with industry. One response to a strategy that would help TAFE trainers be more effective was brazenly expressed as a 'decent manager from TAFE' (B, 82).

... they let their lecturers loose out into the workplace all the time, have no idea what the lecturers are doing, have no idea what they're teaching, what they're delivering, what's going on. Have you costed it right, is the only thing they'd ever get asked. No idea of the quality thing, no idea of the initiatives, or the hours that they work or the sort of programs that they're doing ... [there is a need for] management support from TAFE to know what she's doing and to understand the sorts of staff development that she might need. She learns a lot from being here but on the job training is not everything, you need a bit more than that and they need professional development in areas that TAFE doesn't understand. (B, 82)

When asked whether this was the result of a difference in cultures, the immediate reply was, 'Oh absolutely, standard as well, not just perceived ... Yeah, oh, absolutely...' (E, 82). Callan and Ashworth (2004) also found what they termed 'entrenched and negative stereotypes', such that many businesses felt that TAFE staff did not have the 'industry edge, commercial "savvy" or real understanding of what was needed' (p.58).

TAFE was also criticised for its lack of, or old technology, which one company referred to as 'hopeless'.

... [it] matters in that computer room. They've no technology, their technology from there is hopeless, you know, they should have laptops and data shows and be sort of leading with some of that sort of technical stuff—because we've got all of that. (B, 82)

Apart from the technology, TAFE's methods of training were also perceived to be an area requiring quick adaptation—to become less lecturing- and classroom-like and more interactive.

... the method of teaching, I'm generalising here because I've never actually worked in a TAFE environment, but I imagine that to be quite similar to a classroom environment, in a lot of cases. What we're encouraging here is [to] be as distant from the classroom environment as possible and to have, you know, interactive sessions to get the people up and involved and we don't want to be sitting there sort of lecturing at them. You know, we're given session plans and training materials, but we don't really, or I don't, tend to read from them. I sort of adlib and put it in my own words. But I think for some of the trainers who have come from the classroom perspective that might hinder them a little bit because that's not what they're used to ... (E, 197)

As a result, some of the TAFE practitioners were told 'not to lift your game but change your game' (E, 197).

The administrative and financial management procedures of TAFE are also recognised as areas difficult for industry to comprehend, but, as one TAFE manager concluded, 'You do the best you can' (A, 66). Doing their best often meant changing some of their business practices, which was a

difficult adjustment: 'To use what I call a service level agreement with a major client has been a hard-fought battle ... It was very painful the first year, but we've got better and better' (A, 67).

It was problems such as these that led to the view that many enterprises do not use TAFE, and for reasons relating to more direct and personal service and greater responsiveness, turn instead to private providers.

... actually getting certificates issued is an absolute nightmare, so ... that's why a lot of companies prefer to use other training providers, because much more personalised service, the person you're talking to is the person that issues the certificate. [With] TAFE that's not the case, the person that comes to deliver does that, delivers, someone else generates the material, someone else puts the data into their computer and the facilitator cannot do that and they don't have access to print out certificates so that's what's hard. (A, 40)

And to be honest the service we get from those training providers who provide frontline management, who provide any one of a number of a type of management, supervisory, human resource type training, the service we get is much better than what we get from TAFE, much more willing to do what we want, rather than constantly having to try and get what we want. (A, 37)

Generally, however, TAFE managers were praiseworthy of their trainers being able to understand the potential for culture clashes and to accommodate accordingly. They judged that their trainers had been successful in adapting. In the words of one manager:

... [the TAFE trainer] reads that culture, he's been able to identify a couple of target problem areas that we have systematically been able to work through. And ... that suggests to me that he's actually got a very good understanding about learning culture within the organisation and possibly how he might contribute to that. (TAFE manager, 59)

One interesting facet that helped in this adaptation was some TAFE staff being seen as more akin to industry culture than TAFE culture.

... he's got a very smooth style, which I guess he's learnt because it's conducive to a good business philosophy. He'd certainly be a lot closer to [the company] one [culture] ... he's certainly picked up a lot about our procedures and our processes. (A, 60)

The enterprise staff recognise that the adjustment for the TAFE trainers is difficult at first because of the differences in organisational cultures, especially the 'in your face' nature of the industrial environment.

I think at first there might have been [a difficulty] just while they were getting used to the culture, but now the ... trainers have been involved for ... seven months nearly, so they're getting more and more, not necessarily accepting the culture but they know what is and isn't accepted at work ... Some trainers have come from cultures where they're mainly teaching corporate people or they're mainly teaching TAFE students. It's quite a very different environment to come into and then suddenly you've got all these bubbly energetic people who are like, oh, I don't know if I've really got time for you yet until I work out what you're like, so at first that was really quite in your face for a few of them but now [the situation is much better] ... all the [trainers] have made a really big effort to get to know the participants sort of one on one and so that they are more accepting when you come up and talk to them. It's not just, like, you're here to do this ... and that's all you care about. It really is about forging relationships ... (E, 196)

Sometimes, TAFE personnel referred to government policies as the difficulty, even though specific details were not generally forthcoming, apart from the number of 'different rules' and continual pressure to be more businesslike.

The clash from where I sit, ... is, I think, that government policies are not really in place to support TAFE to deliver training in an enterprise and I think there's all these different rules

... Sometimes with government policies, I find that we're shooting ourselves in the foot, and I'm part of that because I work for the government and I enjoy working for the government, but I find it frustrating because I find that the government policies are pushing TAFEs to be entrepreneurial and business like, however, then there's all these things of, now you're going too far, come back ... (TAFE manager, 225)

Moreover, it is noteworthy that this TAFE manager also believed that companies felt similarly frustrated with changing government policies.

I think that [the company] and other enterprises are very frustrated with the changes in government, they change, you have a system and you know this is the way it is and within a month or three, it could totally change, which therefore means all must change and, you know, it's very difficult. (TAFE manager, 225)

The adjustment of TAFE practitioners to their respective industrial contexts was a gradual process which, in the instance of these case studies, was judged to be largely successful—perhaps not surprisingly, as they had been selected by the TAFE managers for participation in this study. The differences in culture were perceived as stumbling blocks at first, but the TAFE staff were committed to work through these potential barriers. As one TAFE manager concluded:

It may be a problem, but it's not that I'd want to stop. I'd like to work through it, like to work it out, because I think that we could both help and learn from each other, you know, TAFE being a little bit more business-like, maybe business being a little bit more, I guess ... it's not all about money ... [laughing] (TAFE manager, 226)

On the other hand, industry was believed to be lacking people on site who understood how training packages worked. There were also comments in one company about the poor quality of relationships between managers and workers, principally the consequence of recent restructuring, which had given rise to 'a very negative air and a very uncertain air'. In this environment, 'people are frightened to spend money', and 'everybody's got their heads down, nobody's game to stick their head up because their head might go next' (A, 46, 52–3). The view was also expressed that, in many enterprises, there is a tendency once an external provider is involved to abrogate responsibility for training to the external trainer: 'The managers think, oh good, that's not our problem anymore, it's now yours ... there is a bit of a habit of wiping our hands of it' (A, 36).

There were also perceptions held about New Apprenticeships Centres, which were also considered unnecessarily bureaucratic. A TAFE manager referred graphically to 'the diamond of trouble'—the employer, the trainee, TAFE and the New Apprenticeships Centre.

... one of the big problems is this seemingly difficult communication relationship between the employer, the trainee, TAFE and the New Apprenticeships Centre, and that sort of communication if it could be smoothed out somehow would make things a lot easier, because that's where the problems come, that's what causes the hiccups. It is the bureaucracy with the New Apprenticeships Centres ... (D, 154)

The manager also claimed that sometimes there was a fifth player to further complicate the picture—the broker—those who 'sell the product in the first place ... what have they said to make the sale?' (D, 154). Her view was that the New Apprenticeships Centres could be abolished and those functions left to TAFE: 'The TAFEs could just do all that side of it as well, it would be a lot easier' (D, 154). The TAFE practitioner was in agreement, although his description was of 'a three way thing' (omitting the learner), contending that:

... the government [needs to] wake up to themselves and realise that you don't need three, you need two. Now I ask you the question, which one can you get rid of? ... I mean, I do all the enrolment processes ... which I never did before, I had to learn all that, all the funding, all the profiles ... I don't understand why we can't also sign them up with Jobs Plus or the New Apprenticeships Centre and one office controls everything. (D, 169)

Table 1 succinctly summarises these perceptions of the different cultures in these contexts.

**Table 1: Summary of perceived culture differences**

<b>Perceived problems with TAFE</b>	Administrative inefficiency, bureaucracy, paperwork—'awful administrative nightmare' (A, 40–41) Costs charged on nominal hours rather than contact hours—'a rip off' (A, 41) Relies too much on too few individuals who know industry's needs and can meet them Slow to respond—'doesn't cope well with anything out of the ordinary' (A, 33) Staff keeping up with industry Conflict between interpretations of training packages by TAFE and industry TAFE managers not knowing what their people are doing out in industry Lack of understanding about quality, initiatives Need to provide professional development for their staff Lack of, or old, technology—'hopeless' (B, 82) Teaching methods—needing to 'change their game' (E, 197) Fragmented functions—less 'personalised service' (A, 40)
<b>Perceived problems with industry</b>	Lack of people onsite who understand how training packages work Poor relationships within the company In many cases, industry leaving all the training to the external trainer
<b>Perceived problems with New Apprenticeships Centres</b>	Bureaucracy with the New Apprenticeships Centres—'That's where the problems come, that's what causes the hiccups' (D, 154), 'the diamond of trouble' (D, 154), 'a three way thing' (D, 169)

## Training and learning within the enterprises

### Increasing recognition of the importance of formal training

The advent of user choice and training packages has led many of the enterprises to acknowledge the importance of gaining external accreditation. Until then, they had been carrying out the process of recognising current competency within their companies, but these government policies have encouraged them to seek outside accreditation through formal assessments, and to negotiate for an external provider such as TAFE to undertake these within the company. The chief benefits of doing this were that they did not have to send workers away from the company to complete their training, and the credibility accruing from engaging an external registered training provider.

Where training was required, such training was based on training packages—as one TAFE trainer stated: 'We know that the package is something that the industry wants. So it's a sort of a win-win thing' (C, 114). The content is specified by the training package: 'We still have to follow the curriculum ... we've got the training package and we have to adhere to that' (C, 118).

In one case, it was the union award that was clearly stated as the driver: 'The only reason that [the company] has anything to do with it is because it's a requirement and ... it's driven by the union and the union has a representative on the board' (A, 50). The emphasis in this training was heavily on occupational health and safety.

In another case, accredited training was initiated because the company considered that financially it would be 'a good idea'. Its new human resources director had worked with accredited training before and wanted to implement it in her new workplace in order to motivate her largely casually employed workforce.

Look, there was absolutely a need for it ... I mean, she came in and looked at our business and saw an opportunity there obviously, with so many staff and blah, blah, blah, she saw an opportunity there for, like, a business case more than anything ... ninety percent of our staff are casual ... and along with casual hours comes a casual attitude and this is probably one of

our biggest hurdles. How do you get so many staff to be excited and motivated and interested in their job, when often they're working one shift a week or they only work school holidays and you might not have them for two months at a time and it's very, very difficult to communicate to that broader base and to get them excited and engaged ... an absolutely fantastic opportunity to get these people in one place all together and give them that sort of united message, rather than being so diluted going down through all the layers. (E, 182)

In another company, the driving force was stated as the desire to multi-skill their workforce by means of 'some sort of formal training' (F, 247). One company member explained that employer incentives were the catalyst for great growth in traineeships in their enterprise.

... once employer incentives became reasonable to take on trainees, then the potential for huge growth was there and indeed there was ... huge growth for us. We've been a part of that, and I think over that time that the roles of the trainers have just evolved too, with the aim of meeting the clients' needs, meeting employers' needs. (D, 149)

There are therefore a number of different catalysts for learning and adapting to pressures felt in enterprises. As Johnston and Hawke (2002) attempted to demonstrate in their model of learning culture dimensions, the desire to foster a learning culture or commitment to learning does not derive from encouragements of managers alone or the goodwill of employees persuaded of its value, but as a consequence of various managed organisational changes largely initiated by external factors (pp.32–3).

## Learning that is valued in companies

The learning that is valued in the enterprises was variously described as task-oriented (A, 50), one-on-one on equipment (A, 51), on-the-job training (A, 37), hands-on (F, 240), 'training that helps them perform their job more productively, efficiently and safely' (F, 250), in fact, 'anything that will benefit the company ... anything that will help them be better than their competition' (C, 130).

More specifically in terms of content, occupational health and safety was by far the most commonly mentioned discipline, described by one TAFE practitioner as 'definitely promoted and hammered' (A, 50). In these case studies this was followed by customer service—how to provide a top-quality service to people, how to approach customers and ways of dealing with customers, for example, customer complaints; and then leadership training—seen to be 'quite effective ... but ... much longer term' (A, 37) and to be 'paying us back already' (B, 78)—and finally, communication and personal skills.

Apart from these descriptive and content-based responses, three illuminating aspects emerged on this issue of what learning is valued in enterprises. First, the significance of informal learning on the job from everyday work colleagues was strongly emphasised.

The stuff that's most valued ... in this whole organisation is on-the-job training that people do, day-to-day, where there's no external training provider, it's just fellow employees training other people how to do the job—certainly our most effective and the cheapest (A, company member, 37).

This supports other work which has shown that learning from work and from colleagues is a crucial means of learning in the workplace, one that has often been ignored, down-played or under-estimated (Harris, Simons & Bone 2000; Garrick 1998; Boud & Middleton 2003). Learning network theory confirms the existence and importance of the self-initiated learning system in organisations, as distinct from the external learning system (Van der Krogt 1998), as well as suggests that social participation within the routine practices and relationships of the workplace—labelled a 'community of practice' (Wenger 1998)—is a powerful and respected way of learning in that environment, which holds implications for the ways in which TAFE practitioners work with enterprises.

Second, the importance of instilling the need for ongoing learning was highlighted: ‘The next step will be, once we’ve completed this program with them, is to ... identify how we’re going to continue this improvement all the time and not expect the staff to stop learning’ (F, TAFE practitioner, 240). And third, despite the focus of these interviews being on the ways in which external providers work, the value of in-house training was reinforced.

Our HR department is actually getting people from within the organisation and then training them up as trainers to deliver supervisor level ... because we just find that, a lot of the training that you send out to external organisations, it’s great that your supervisors get to mingle with other people from other industries and so forth, but I think it gets lost in generalisation, it doesn’t get down to the specifics of what they need to do to perform their job better here.

(F, company member, 250)

It is here, then, that the juxtapositioning of in-house training (including informal learning on the job) versus external training is most visibly seen. There is clearly a preference for training that can be done from within companies—for reasons of relevance, convenience and cost. However, what is significant is that the actual experience of close arrangements such as those illustrated in these case studies has led company personnel to be considerably more positive about the benefits of a midway alternative than previously, when they had only the experience of sending workers off site to base their judgement on. As distinct from completely outsourcing to an outside party, or having training wholly in house, what these case studies have demonstrated is that the midway option of having an outsider working within the company can be extremely valuable.

The implication for the TAFE practitioners, as reflected through this report, is that for this value to be realised and recognised, they needed to be responsive to the practicalities of the workplace in their training and in their customising of materials, and to demonstrate ways of working that resonate with both the expectations of the companies’ personnel (managers and workers) and the exigencies of the companies’ work. To be able to do this required an understanding and an appreciation that they had a considerable amount of learning to do themselves.

## Managers’ views of learning

The general picture of management’s view of learning is not such a positive one. Where there was support for learning programs, interviewees believed it came more from middle management down. A somewhat cynical view was that senior managers sought training by external providers not merely because it was accredited but also because it was a way of washing their hands of it, and then ‘if there’re any issues, they can point their finger back at TAFE or indirectly at me’ (A, 51). Another opinion was that managers find it difficult or uncomfortable to be with their staff in the same training room, ‘The non-verbals that I get from those staff is sometimes, you know, what are you doing over there, but the ones that have done the training understand’ (D, 163).

The training personnel in the companies did not always feel supported by their managers. One said that she felt training, in fact human resources as a function, was not ‘truly understood by this organisation and as such is not embraced to its full potential. It’s still used like the good old days of fire fighting, where you used human resources to get rid of people and sack people and protect us when we’re being sued’ (E, 183). Human resources issues were treated in a very reactive way: ‘I don’t think they fully understand how it can be used proactively to actually influence and affect your bottom line. And that is a massive culture change within itself’ (E, 183). Another company trainer expressed the issue in terms of the ‘old school’: ‘You’ve got a few people not a lot, probably ... a quarter of the people, I’m talking of management kind of people here, it’s sort of old school, they’ll do it because they have to, but they’re still not convinced about the merit of it just yet’ (E, 192). However, both company staff were optimistic they were now witnessing a change, with ‘more and more coming on side, so it’s been more from ... the middle management down, but now the upper managers are seeing how enthusiastic the middle managers and the line managers are, ... I’d say that now it’s going to come more from them as well, actually pushing the program’ (E, 193).



At another site, the view was that training can sometimes be perceived by managers as ‘not a time waster, but ... time that they get behind in their work ... but long-term, they see that it’s improving people’s performance and so forth’ (F, 251). Again, the view was optimistic with regard to the future, that because of the changes the company had gone through with their new warehouse management system, and the training they needed to do with the people on the shop floor:

... the attitude towards training ... is in the process of changing because they now know that, if they want to do something down there, they need to train their people to be more efficient at doing it. It’s no good just bringing in a system and expecting the person to pick it up as they go, they’ve got to train the person to do the job. And I think their attitude towards training will be a lot better because of that ... I mean, it’s a continual learning process.

(F, TAFE trainer, 246)

One of the hindrances for the TAFE practitioner, as described by one of the company members, was ‘stubbornness from the managers ... actually us, the managers, sitting down with him’ (D, company member, 178). What was required to minimise this hindrance, in the words of this company member, was:

... management accepting a new role of coming in, saying, ‘he’s not an outsider, he is an insider, he’s teaching us roles and we have to listen to what he says and also put [it] into practice. So it’s, yes, he’s teaching our staff, it’s up to us to say, yes, let’s do it’; not up to like me only with the whole management system. With staff stubbornness all I can say is that we just have to sit down with the staff and say you either learn and you learn it how we want it, or if you’re not happy with it, then the doors are always open.

(D, 178)

Thus, while the views of those involved in training were that many of their managers were of the ‘old school’, that training was only being done because it had to be done and they were not totally convinced of its benefits, they were nevertheless confident that their managers were gradually becoming more appreciative of the ongoing effects of their programs and more persuaded of the positive influence they were having in bringing about culture change.

## Workers’ views of learning

The workers too were judged by those involved in training to be generally somewhat reticent about training, particularly in the early stages of the TAFE–enterprise partnerships. One TAFE trainer claimed: ‘I think there are some people that are keen, that really want to get ahead ... [but] I still think there’s a philosophy that it’s just another interruption to their work because their work is production’ (A, 51). Said another interviewee, this time a company member, ‘At the start, everyone seemed to be on egg shells, they weren’t really sure ...’ (D, 176).

The TAFE trainer at case study F told the same story: ‘I think that when I first started down there, a negative reaction to it [training]’. Some of them, he understood, were quite happy to continue doing the job they were doing and continuing to do that for the rest of their lives. A common fear was that, if they did not ‘come up to speed’, they might lose their job. A softening in reaction gradually grew as they had become more acquainted with him and as results could become more evident. What the trainer did was to carefully explain that what he was doing was identifying their present skills and whether their skill level met the company’s expectations, and that it was not going to be a fail or pass but an opportunity then to bring it up to the company’s expectations if that was what was required (F, TAFE trainer, 241). A significant aspect in overcoming their initial resistance was seeing others beginning to do the training, getting through it and gaining a certificate: ‘It’s something tangible that they can have in their hand; for too long, these people have had these skills ... [but] they didn’t have any recognised paper for [them] ... so, at first the attitude wasn’t that flash, but now they’re seeing that it’s relevant to their job’ (F, company contact, 250).

In one case, it was the strong belief of the company training manager who influenced the trainers—both TAFE and company—to employ an approach which turned out to be

extraordinarily effective for those particular learners, who were mainly young and casually employed. This approach involved strongly emphasising that the learning was not for company needs but for their own career possibilities, that the skills they would learn would be transferable: ‘We very much had to go down the road of selling the benefits to the participant instead of saying, “it’s going to make you a better employee for [the company]”’ (E, 184). (This approach, training for transfer, was referred to by Choi et al. [2001, p.3] who recommended that reviews of training packages allow for more training in skills and knowledge that would benefit learners not only in their current workplaces, but also in their future employment.)

When informed by the interviewer that this aspect had indeed surfaced distinctly in the interview with her learners, her delighted, and rather enlightened response in contrast with many other managers, was:

Absolutely! I’m pleased that they understand that. We did make a really big point of highlighting that, and I said to all the trainers from the outset: ‘I don’t want you going in there waving flags for [the company] because that is the best way to get these people offside. In many regards, we are the enemy and you’re far better going in there and saying, this is for you guys and this is about your futures, whether they belong in [the company] or whether they’ll sit outside of [the company], it’s for you moving forward’, and selling it that way to them, which is absolutely the true way anyway, because let’s face it, that’s what we’re doing here. We want to keep the best of the best and career path them through [the company]. And people that don’t want to be here, fine, that’s terrific, we’ll get them skilled up so that they’re better while they are here, but then they’re free to leave when they want to as well. (E, 184)

More commonly, however, it was the influence of the TAFE practitioner—the ‘outsider’ working inside company ranks—which made all the difference in the more conventional work contexts in terms of motivating employees to undertake further learning. In these cases, it was the scepticism of longer-term workers that had to be overcome. In the following case, this was accomplished through the ‘personal traits’ of the TAFE practitioner, reinforcing the importance of having practitioners with good interpersonal skills, sound abilities and appropriate personality for the target audience.

... he’s really made a difference to the way people view their work and so, from it affecting individuals within the organisation, that obviously has an impact on the overall culture and climate. Quite often with the traineeship, what you find is that employers are quite in favour, with the incentives being attached to it, but the individuals, the employees, are not always keen to go ahead, especially the ones that have been working in the venue for fifteen years and doing their job. They’re saying, well, what’s this young buck from TAFE going to be able to tell me that I don’t know already? Quite often the answer might be, well, not really that much maybe, I mean, who knows, but the employees are not always exactly knocking on the door wanting to go onto the program but the employer will apply some pressure for that to occur. And we’ve noticed that there is, not with everybody of course because it never is totally conclusive, but there’s a huge majority of people that, even if they’re reluctant starters, they end up being very positive about the program some point in the way through it and I think a lot of that is because of the individual personal traits that the trainer has, in their communications and ability ... that’s very important. (D, 152–3)

The interviewees were optimistic that these attitudes of resistance and scepticism were gradually changing. From being on egg shells at the beginning, explained one company member, ‘Now they’re eager, they’re eager for information, the more they learn the more they enjoy working here. That’s what I’m finding out’ (D, 176). Another company member said, ‘It was such unknown territory and then the thing just got bigger and bigger, the word got out, staff were approaching us about, hey, I’m not eligible but I want to be in it. Absolutely, yeah, it’s been fantastic’ (E, company member, 185). Yet another company member at a different site held a similarly favourable view of the change in attitude towards learning that was happening, especially through the achievement of formal credentials.

I think it's changing. At first, the thought of actually doing this course, it was some resistance, but as they saw other people starting to do it and get through it, the attitude towards it has changed ... just promoting that once they achieve their Certificate III ... it's something tangible that they can have in their hand. For too long these people have had these skills, you know, communication ... and all the other facets of the business that they deal in ..., but they didn't have any recognised paper for it or certificate. It's good finding that they'll get that at the end of the training, so, at first, the attitude wasn't that flash but now they're seeing that it's relevant to their job ... (F, 250)

## TAFE–industry linkages

There are many different models for TAFE practitioners to work with and within industry. The most common arrangement in this study was where an individual works with an enterprise for a certain number of days or sessions a week—this was the arrangement in five of the six cases in this research. Another model is where a TAFE practitioner is almost totally based within an organisation, an arrangement which one TAFE manager said they had in place, but wasn't convinced that this was the best arrangement and required 'a bit of revision to tidy up bits and pieces about it' (A, 65). A further model, practised very effectively by case study E, is where a group of TAFE practitioners work collaboratively with a group of enterprise trainers.

The actual types of arrangements are heavily dependent on personal relationships, and where these were not apparent, 'much more structured, much more traditional arrangements' (A, 65) were likely to be occurring. As one TAFE manager insightfully expressed it: 'The shades of what arrangements you can come to are only varied by the nature of people's arrangements with each other' (A, 65). In these case studies, there was a variety of such relationships. One was a private consultant hired by TAFE to work for them (cf. Chappell & Johnston 2003, p.5) with an enterprise for which he had previously worked for 21 years but had been made redundant.

... a particularly beneficial arrangement, certainly. Because he was looking for opportunities for work under his own banner, he's probably highlighted opportunities or brought them to our attention that we might not necessarily have picked up. So in that sense he's developed a good business sense about what is an opportunity and actually made it a win-win all round. (A, TAFE manager, 65)

In another case, the company member used to be a coordinator in the linking TAFE institute, and had had, in that role, 'a long-term relationship on and off over time with the company' (B, 71). She therefore 'knew what programs [the company] was really looking for, ... [and] had a good picture of what our [TAFE] skills were ... and so in discussions with us she could see where we might fit and where we might have a role' (B, 94). She had a Master of Education qualification which gave her a sound understanding of educational issues; for example, 'She really believes strongly in whole-of-life learning and so she'll give them opportunities even though they may never be on a computer, it's just like opening up the mind, so which opens up to further possibilities on a personal level'. (B, 97) She was on very good working terms with the TAFE practitioner, her former colleague in TAFE.

In case study C, the TAFE practitioner had been a respected chef in the local regional area and had 'good rapport with the industry' (C, 113), while in case study D, the TAFE practitioner was adjudged closer to industry than TAFE culture. In the fifth case, the main TAFE practitioner worked in the company for three months to understand its needs and how it worked (E, 184). His group of TAFE trainers were selected by means of 'auditions' (E, 187) where they brought their own material into the company and presented it to a selection panel, so 'we were very confident from the start that they were people that came across well and had the right sort of personality to mix with our young staff and so on' (E, 187). In case study F, the TAFE manager, TAFE practitioner and the company contact were good friends, and the TAFE manager believed that his practitioner had been in the company 'long enough now he could probably just about step into the warehouse manager's role' (F, 231).

## Evolving and expanding roles of the TAFE practitioners

The TAFE practitioners carried out many varied activities, including training delivery, 'writing knowledge components that go with the observable' (A, 57), development of learning materials, especially through development of standard operating procedures that could then be worked through with learning materials, designing assessment instruments and shaping them to client needs, undertaking recognition of competencies by means of interviews with individuals ('they're major exercises', A, 57) and conducting induction courses and assisting the company with training needs. One TAFE manager referred to the number of roles she mentioned for her practitioner as 'that little laundry list!' (D, 150).

Several of the participants highlighted that the roles of TAFE practitioners working with enterprises had 'evolved' (D, 149) and were more extended than commonly believed. The diversity in these roles is most graphically portrayed in the voices of the participants themselves. Some of the more interesting ways in which these roles were depicted included the following:

- ✧ 'I'm the meat in the sandwich' (A, 51).
- ✧ 'Look, I mean, you can't keep everybody happy ... What we try and do is splash the paint and cover as much we can and that's the best that you can do ...' (D, 163).
- ✧ 'As a trainer, I guess my priority is to get the training session well and truly completed within the timeframe that's allocated' (E, 213).
- ✧ 'It's alphabet soup, you know, it's just trying to juggle it all' (D, 169).
- ✧ 'I've got more than half of my body into this program and I really need to pull myself out ... Yes, snowed right under ...' (E, TAFE manager, 228).
- ✧ 'I've really just been chasing my tail, just to try and keep the venues happy ...' (D, 161).
- ✧ 'It really is about forging relationships' (E, company trainer, 196).
- ✧ 'I think that we could both help and learn from each other, you know' (E, TAFE manager, 226).

### Practitioners as linkers

A principal role was as a link between TAFE and the enterprise. All TAFE practitioners were employed by the institutes, except in one case where the person was actually a private consultant (a registered workplace trainer and assessor) who was seen to be 'extremely useful' for TAFE (A, 58). Because he ran his own business, he did not count as an employee of the TAFE institute, and consequently the institute had been able, at the time of interview, to negotiate 16 contracts of service with him over the last 18 months. Because he had previously worked in the company, he was an enormous benefit to the institute, described by the TAFE manager as having intimate knowledge of the people, their positions, their problems and their production processes, and as clearly having a training focus. Because of his close association, he had been able to identify gaps for the company and had been 'instrumental in changing the training from what was a more traditional model' (A, 58). The TAFE manager's judgement was that 'overtly or covertly, he's absorbed the culture of training delivery and has been able to recognise opportunities of how you can do it in different ways [and] for this reason, he has become a key link for us' (A, 58). The company member also acknowledged that, as the practitioner had been out of the organisation only just over two years, some things had changed, but he did not have to adjust greatly because 'he already had that knowledge, so it's easier for him to keep up to date with what's going on' (A, 38).

One interesting extended role that a TAFE practitioner had in a regional area was as a de facto employment agent or broker (Board of Vocational Education and Training 2002), recommending to the local company, when they need staff or are looking at taking on apprentices, people whom he thinks will be suitable for that company's needs (C, 127). Another extended role was as a coordinator of a program between the company site and the New Apprenticeships Centre, dealing

with claims and payments, and acting as the 'chaser upper person' there (D, 149). Other roles included being a consultant to the manager in the general running of the business in areas where they felt his knowledge and expertise could be useful, being a 'salesperson to encourage new people' and being a personal consultant or coach or mentor counsellor to individual members of staff about them and their work (D, 150). 'So it's a much broader role than one might expect of a traditional trainer', said the TAFE manager in case study D (D, 149).

Apart from the more conventional aspects of the TAFE practitioners' roles relating to development, delivery and assessment, one of the important ways in which they added value was providing the bigger picture beyond any single company. For example, one company contact said that the TAFE practitioner 'is actually coming in and doing the school side of the hospitality, and making all the waiters aware of what's going on and updating them with all the information that's out there' (D, 171).

## Supportive relationships

Another significant role was as a support. This role had a dual focus. It included being a support to workers: 'Another role that I've got in that program is as a support, because a lot of the people here have a low level of literacy and have problems with written assessments. So I have a support role in that, either for specific assessments or building skills to support assessments that they're going for' (B, 93). But it also included being a support to managers: 'He's become "a good asset" ... when I first came, I didn't have enough time to sit with them and do it ... I mean, being a manager, you know you can't spend more than five minutes in one place, you have to keep running around' (D, 177).

A very important facet of this role was fitting in with regular work patterns, and not interrupting the natural flow of work. Almost all interviewees referred to the difficulty of workers being available for learning (see table 12, appendix E), and so fitting in around their work, in terms of timing and selecting modules that matched their individual work patterns, was important to keeping learners motivated. This was particularly well done at case study F. Several also claimed that they influenced the informal learning in companies in the following ways: 'Something that we try to do with our learners is ... round them off, try and install some passion' (F, 119); 'I encourage learning from others, I push that through their training in some of the modules that they do, coach others in job skills' (F, 165); and 'I always like to share any knowledge that I have in relation to working in the retail industry ... and where I can support somebody I do without crossing the line and taking up any personal time' (F, 213-4).

## Understanding the enterprise

A critical characteristic of the TAFE practitioners that helped to make them effective in their expanding roles was their industry experience. This afforded them a high degree of credibility, respect and influence. They were respected because they had been able to re-invent themselves in a new shape and form, and as one manager believed, this tended to be seen as 'the essence of a person who's become successful' (A, 60). As a result, these TAFE practitioners had significant influence in the companies with which they worked. In one case, the TAFE practitioner was described as knowing 'that business inside out and back to front and that's a big advantage to us' (C, 114) and another as: 'She knows the industry inside out' (Sydney TAFE manager). One practitioner believed that the company staff have 'high respect for me because I made them a promise and I've honoured my commitment that I made, and I think they've understood that ... I came in and delivered the goods and that's why I think we have made it' (D, 163). A significant point to note here is that sometimes the TAFE practitioners were recruited specifically for the industry linkage. One TAFE institute (case study A) employed a private contractor familiar with its link company; another (E, 221) hired a curriculum developer to write many of the materials and hired out its training practitioners (E, 227), and in yet another, an ex-regional manager was hired in to train in the link company (Sydney interview).

When the TAFE practitioners do not have such an intimate knowledge of industry and especially the enterprises, they are not perceived as nearly so effective, as one company member explained.

... one of the problems you have with organisations like TAFE is, although they say that their facilitators go back in the industry every now and then so they're kept up-to-date, they're only going back ... for a very brief period of time. And that's understandable, but they don't have that knowledge of how an organisation works, or they lose track, and so therefore they can't deliver what you need—they can only take a guess at what you need. (A, 39)

Their evolving role frequently involved the very important skill, no doubt greatly assisted by their industry experience, of identifying gaps and 'topping up', as in the case of this TAFE practitioner: 'In that module, we've identified about six people that need to come back, or I'm going to spend time with them, and going through the safety aspects of filling up the gas bottles so they don't blow their head off' (F, 239). It was a skill that was considered special—not a part of every trainer's repertoire, and certainly not one used in classroom settings. One company member articulated this in these words:

... we're not talking about sitting down in a classroom for eight hours learning about a filler because they have that knowledge already. If that was the case, it would be a bit different, then no doubt [the TAFE trainer] would develop just the standard TAFE material which wouldn't necessarily line up with what they're doing on the job ... [Instead], we're going through a process of, okay, they know all this stuff, there might be a little bit of a gap there, test to see if there is a gap, if there is, then we'll train them up in that gap but we generally just talk about theory. So [the TAFE practitioner] really has the ability to deliver what's required because we don't want any more than that. And he is very good at looking at the standard and saying, okay, this is the shortfall, we'll just deliver [that]—totally different to some other TAFE facilitators ... (A, 39)

Apart from their industry background, there were a number of other reasons why TAFE and company managers considered the TAFE practitioners to be effective. Two factors that were particularly relevant in regional areas were having close relationships (he had taught many of the chefs in the region) and living locally for years. Another factor was interpersonal skills, as one TAFE manager stated.

There's a whole range of people involved in the organisation that will be at different levels, and so his ability to relate to those individuals at an appropriate level and in an appropriate manner is, I think, quite critical ... his personal skills and communication help him an awful lot. (C, 155)

A company member described her TAFE practitioner's strength as 'a real team-focused, team-building sort of person' (B, 72). Another factor was the ability to be flexible. A TAFE manager believed such flexibility to be 'critical to ... the success of the program', and that 'in workplace training, it's important to be extremely flexible in how it's interpreted ... So yes, he will make a difference in that way, in that he will interpret the assessment and package appropriately (C, 151).

## Customising the process

A significant part of the TAFE practitioners' evolving and expanding work is customising materials for their enterprise to make them more enterprise-specific and therefore more relevant—what one company member termed 'tweaking to suit company needs' (Sydney interview). Quite often, this meant that the TAFE practitioners were able to add value by raising the standard of content.

Mainly we've adapted the content to be specific to that particular workplace, we haven't changed the actual content. All we've done is ... made it so it looks like it actually belongs to that company. But we haven't changed the content. In a couple of places we've increased the level of content, because the company particularly wanted to address issues while we were

there and we've actually lifted the level of what the people had to know to be deemed competent for that unit. (F, 232–3)

At other times, they could do this by tailoring and sharpening assessment instruments used in companies, expressed as a fine-tuning process: 'Well, what we had to do was look at their work environment and then adjust, or fine-tune, the assessment criteria to each of the units that they'd selected, that is, workplace communications, calculations, OH&S requirements, housekeeping requirements ...' (F, 236). In most instances, it generally involved tailoring their own TAFE materials in the light of both company needs and training package requirements in order to meet client demands.

I guess what we really look at is what are the industry needs, then we will tailor ... this particular package to suit what the hotel's requirements are and keep it within the guidelines of the training package. So they end up with a cert one in cookery and a cert two in hospitality ... with that gaming room up there, we look at what the students are going to need to be useful employees and take it from there. (C, 114)

## Fitting in

That these TAFE practitioners' roles were evolving and expanding meant that these individuals were continually in the process of learning how to work with enterprises. A company member, when asked how much the TAFE practitioner knows about the internal workings of the company, responded: 'Oh, she's not too bad now, but it's taken a lot of time to educate her' (B, 79). One of the main ways of becoming more acquainted with the company was informally, 'because the workers talk to her about things like that' (B, 80). In another case, a TAFE practitioner stated: '... what I've tried to do is kill two birds with the one stone and try and suss out what we need and what they need, because if we can't meet what they need, well, what we're doing is a waste of time. I think that is where it's taken three years for us to learn that that's the secret' (D, 166).

There were, in fact, differing perceptions within each company of how much the TAFE practitioners knew of the internal workings of the enterprises with which they were working (see table 3, appendix D). It is interesting that, in nearly all cases, the three other types of interviewees rated the practitioners' knowledge more highly than did the practitioners themselves, with the TAFE managers clearly rating most highly their practitioners' level of knowledge. They clearly think that the practitioners know more than they (the managers) themselves do in relation to organisation of work, types of work and workplace relationships. The practitioners, the central actors in these scenarios, evidently believed that they had a considerable amount of learning to do vis-à-vis their enterprises. In terms of how much this knowledge affected their role in the companies, however, both TAFE interviewees rated more highly this influence than the company interviewees.

The key change that TAFE practitioners had to make was to adapt to the enterprise culture, because:

You have to understand the culture. Everything we do in our training is about changing cultures and learning skill developments, so she needs to understand where the culture is ... I mean that from a workplace culture point of view, so she has to really understand that ... we're just shifting our culture and moving it all the time. (B, 80)

One implication of this was that they could not simply inject their own ways of training into an enterprise. One company member warned: 'You can't just come in and plug in a program ... it's in the workplace, so it's workplace based' (B, 80). Another company member drew attention to the issues that need to be faced.

... it's always an acknowledgement before you bring a training program in and before you plan it, who we're pitching ..., what about the people [and] what level, how much can they sustain, how it would have to be developed, the quality of the resources, the minimisation of

the resources. You know, we still have people who bring in ... a hundred-page folder with two days worth of training from time to time ... (B, 74)

As one TAFE practitioner acknowledged, 'I would never ever bring in a language book from elsewhere to do a session because it just doesn't apply. So I use all of their materials in what I do ...' (B, 98).

Another facet was to become acquainted as quickly as possible with the enterprise environment. 'I think the biggest thing was to try and get to know their environment because I'd never worked in a paper warehouse before. I've worked in warehouses before, but not particularly paper. I had to familiarise myself with their working environment' (F, 237). But for this TAFE practitioner, two other points were also critical: 'to convince the people what I was there for and explain to them why I was there', and 'not to try and interrupt their workflow too much. So we had to be very careful that, if they were extremely busy, then it was no good me standing around waiting for someone' (F, 237).

A further aspect of their expanding role was learning how to cope with reluctant on-the-job learners. This was one of the most common themes in the interviews. Almost all interviewees talked about learners being slow to appreciate the need for further learning and their attitudes were described variously as not 'that flash' (F, 250), 'not always keen' (D, 152) and 'not always exactly knocking on the door' (D, 152). This aspect was discussed earlier in this report under workers' perspectives.

## Power and control

As the TAFE practitioners' roles evolved and expanded, they found that they were increasingly absent from their institutes. Being absorbed by their work within enterprises, the time and commitment required for that work, and the pressures of travelling, sometimes across cities, necessarily implied that the TAFE practitioners could not physically be available at the institutes as much as they had previously.

... you need to understand that I've been on the road now since November 2000 ... I get to [the institute] maybe once a fortnight if I'm lucky. I operate from my office at home because all my venues are [the opposite side of the city]. I've tapped into a new market that they never had, obviously it worked out for both. So ... in the last two or three years, I haven't had much involvement there ... I've really just been chasing my tail, just to try and keep the venues happy ... (D, 161)

While such absence was not a matter for concern for many of their TAFE managers, others were worried about the lack of reporting and their own degree of control. While acknowledging the restrictions of time, the manager of the above practitioner articulated her concern, not so much in terms of lack of trust, as of having responsibility for occupational safety, and being more 'in the loop':

... these trainers that are out there in the workplace all the time, they act very autonomously and so, as a manager, I have some concerns about the level of reporting, should I be more involved and informed? ... We operate like a business, but it's still an educational structure, so they all report to me. It's not possible necessarily to have a great deal but, should I be asking them to report back more to me, you know? *It's a control issue* I suppose, and I guess my concern there lies not in that I distrust these trainers, because I have every faith in what they do ... it's more if there were some sort of an accident somewhere, I wouldn't even know in any one day where they were or what they were doing, whether they were at home, whether they're in a venue, you know, what. And I feel that that could come back to haunt me given a certain situation occurring, so ... I think we may need to look at some type of reporting back from them that's not going to be too onerous on them but might help, might make me feel like I'm a little bit more in the loop. (D, 156-7)

In the light of this comment, it is significant to recall that one of the criticisms from industry in a different case study was that TAFE managers did not know where their practitioners were or what



they were doing (B, 82), and also that one of the missing interviews for this study was a TAFE manager, principally because there was no one available to be interviewed who knew enough about the work of their practitioner.

The issue of power is an interesting theme that kept surfacing in subtle ways throughout the course of the interviews. It manifested itself in different ways. Apart from the example above about TAFE managers and their authority over TAFE practitioners, it appeared also in discussions about who makes decisions about training content.

I guess me [TAFE manager], in terms of we wrote the training package ... So I sort of ... make sure that it's up to scratch and in terms of [the company] customising the content, we get that input from [the company] and from their staff, but again at the end of the day I sign off on it. (E, 222)

In another instance, the TAFE practitioner and the company member inferred different positions on this issue when talking about the organisation of learning in the company. From the TAFE practitioner's viewpoint, it was a case of: 'Basically, they do exactly what I say, right, they follow what I do' (D, 160), while the company member's perspective was: 'Basically, me ... What and how they learn is made between me and [the TAFE practitioner] but what they actually are given is usually mine and the General Manager's decision' (D, 172-3). He went on to explain that the TAFE practitioner 'makes them more clear on my thoughts in setting the table, in servicing of the guest' (D, 174) and an example given was that:

... what [the TAFE practitioner] teaches is general. He teaches the right way of doing things, but we actually emphasise our procedures that we've got here. Like silver service, we don't go right through the silver service but we want their standards, so the waiters know what silver service is and they can give the best service to the table. (D, 173)

This was a learning process for the TAFE practitioner, according to the company member: 'It's still a learning process. He understands my needs ...' (D, 175).

A very important aspect of the TAFE practitioners' expanding role was learning how to meld what they did in a company with the regular patterns of work, and learning if and when to intervene. In the words of one practitioner:

I'm pretty switched on about what they expect of me and what they expect of their workers, so I try not to interrupt their flow of work to any great extent. I try to fit into their flow of work and if I have a problem with trying to get people out of the workforce to do a particular unit, and it is not something that will flow in with their activity at the present time, then I'll go and talk to the warehouse manager and say look, I've got this problem, I need this person to come out of there or is there something else I can do to fill my time ... (F, 242)

Such adjustment draws attention to the tension between work networks and learning networks and how, in this tension, work has priority over learning (Van der Krogt 1998; Poell et al. 2000). This example illustrates a high level of understanding, even if intuitively, on the part of the TAFE practitioner, as well as the ability to be able to accommodate his endeavours to facilitate learning with the imperatives of work within that company.

## Being responsive and visible

While terms such as 'competitive market' and 'user choice' were specifically mentioned by only one interviewee (significantly, a rural TAFE manager), nevertheless they were pressures that were keenly felt by all TAFE personnel and underpinned their efforts to be as responsive as possible. One TAFE manager admitted that, 'In a sense, we've in recent years begun to explore some of the additional opportunities available to us', referring not only to partnership arrangements but also to services

provided: 'In some companies we don't just train in the formal sense of the word, we offer consultancy services by developing specific tools, like a skills audit tool for one company' (A, 65).

The theme of responsiveness was prevalent in the interviews, and was articulated in many different ways. One termed it being 'in their hands virtually', in that the services were 'all negotiated, we certainly don't go in there to impose on them, it's a negotiated thing: what do you want to learn, when do you want to learn it, how do you want to learn it, yeah, how do you want it assessed, how many people have we got, when do you want it' (C, 107). The consequence, if this did not occur, was that 'people vote with their feet', particularly in country areas where 'word very soon spreads around'.

... and they've got freedom of choice, competitive market, they can either go to other local providers, ... so there's a lot of alternatives to us so we really have to be on, we have to be good because we're providing for, well fighting in the competitive market, yeah, it's a user choice, user has choice of whether to take the training. (C, 107)

Another way in which responsiveness is indicated is by TAFE practitioners taking on many different roles in enterprises: 'I think he's taken on those additional roles, and he's not exclusive—all the trainers would be like that, because the client's needs are ultimately better met that way. And if we just went in there, saying we're the trainer and blocking out everything else, then we're not going to keep the business' (D, 150). In this way, the TAFE practitioners were more likely to be able to meet the expectations and demands of their enterprise.

A critical component of being responsive to industry involved being visible. A TAFE manager articulated this as 'continuity'.

... if you're going to start working in closely with industry, you've got to be able to keep going around and around and around, coming back and revisit, revisit, make new ground, come back, you know, offer things, do things come back and visit again. It's no good just [being] ... out there for two or three months and then disappearing. (C, 109)

This meant going to meetings, participating in luncheons and visiting companies, 'so those people in those establishments can see that we're there to support them and we're visible, you know, we get to know their business while visiting so we have other ways of doing things as well' (C, 109).

Some specific strategies in working with enterprises included four-hour monthly meetings with company staff to ensure relevance (E, 187), sharing the teaching, follow-up and the paperwork with company trainers (E, 191), and seeking input into materials to make them more specific to company procedures (E, 193). In the view of the enterprise staff, their contribution was seen by TAFE as valuable, because 'they didn't really have any [the company] experience and so they were relying on us to say, well, this is actually how it works' (E, 193). It was perceived to be helpful because the TAFE trainers, while being 'very effective trainers in terms of the theoretical part of it ... I have to say that when it comes to practical things ... the staff are more likely to ask the [company trainers] about [the company-] specific things, because they know that's what we've got the experience in' (E, 195).

Such customisation of materials and teaching methods was another manifestation of the responsiveness of TAFE. It was seen by one TAFE manager as 'essential', because:

... otherwise you're going to have a generic resource tool which a lot of people may resent and think, well, I know this stuff, why are you making me do this general stuff, whereas when you what we call [company]-ise it, it's customised so that it suits the client, and also not just the client but the actual people that you're training because it needs to be relevant. (E, 221)

In these case studies, it is not surprising that TAFE won favourable comparisons with other providers since the enterprises had all chosen to work with TAFE, but the reasons given are informative. Two contrasts in particular were with small providers without the level of infrastructure—'I think that if we'd gone with a private training organisation we would have hit the wall long ago' (E, 184)—and with those not offering accredited training.

The ... provider came in and did some training and [the company] group actually put a couple of their people in there, but it was non-accredited training and no one had the understanding of what the accreditation really meant. We ended up putting out fires probably for about twelve months after that from people that were coming to us and saying, 'I've got this ticket', and they actually didn't have a ticket. (C, 115)

Learning to be responsive and visible implied a change from what was perceived by one company member with previous TAFE experience as the old model of TAFE working with enterprises.

TAFE used to have this awful model, where they'd say: we're the expert lecturer, we'll teach the program, you come along and mop up the problems that we create with learning support. And that was an appalling model that [an institute] had brought in before I had anything to do with the organisation. It was bred out of ignorance, it was an appalling model. It's like, there's some little sort of defect, like language skills is something that you just do a little bit of training in and you catch up, oh you know, hop outside and we'll teach you how to use the press, X amount of time and you'll be able to use it and you'll be right.

(B, company contact, 73)

Fortunately this interviewee was able to declare that this model no longer existed in her company: 'It took five or six years to get it out of the system. It's completely gone now and if anyone came in and brought it back in again ...' (B, 73).

## Becoming one of them

As a consequence of close working arrangements with the enterprises, and increasingly spending more time there than in their institutes, the TAFE practitioners became closely affiliated with their linking companies. They often came, therefore, to be identified and even named almost as one of the company staff. For example, one TAFE practitioner could claim: 'I feel like I'm actually part of the site, that I'm not external ... Yes, I kind of feel like one of them, so that's really good' (E, 217), while two different TAFE managers said, 'As far as the clients are concerned, you're now part of their furniture' (D, 156) and, 'He could probably just about step into the warehouse manager's role, I suggest, he's been there that often and because of the way he works with them ... basically he could be one of their people, it's as simple as that' (F, 231 and 234). A company contact reinforced this last close relationship.

I think [the TAFE practitioner] has become like a part of our company and a person that people know and also trust and, when he does his training, people are not scared to put up their hand and say, okay, I don't know now ... Yeah, look, we see him as a part of our business. (F, 251)

## Perspectives on the influence of the TAFE practitioners

### The learners' view

An important perspective on the ways in which TAFE practitioners work with enterprises is afforded by the on-the-job learners. They are in the unique position of being familiar with their own organisation and at the same time learning under the guidance of an external facilitator. Some of the actions that the learners appreciated were their helpfulness: 'She's very helpful ... [with] assessment, if she knows that you've missed that part and don't really understand it, she will ask you to get you to understand about it and so on—very good' (B, 85); their provision of up-to-date information: 'We've been introduced to lots of different concepts and been introduced to lots of different foods, he's worked out in the industry so he's sort of given us glimpses, ... an insight into what's really happening out there, and [he] seems to be really in touch with what's happening out there with trends and food (C, learner P, 136); the sharing of personal experiences: 'I like how they

incorporate personal experiences into the class, I find that really interesting and sort of, like you said, gives you an insight' (C, learner M, 136); their explanations: 'We get shown every single step and I find that's helpful ... and I notice ... that's also helped me out in industry for where I work' (C, learner M, 136); their personal attributes: 'Obviously his enthusiasm ... helps you to be more, you know, to be interested in what's happening and gets you more involved' (C, learner M, 136); and their dedication: 'He will even have learners in his own home because he can't get to see them because of the shifts that they work and he'll say "Pop round to my house at eleven o'clock at night and we'll do the session then"' (D, 153).

What two learners commented they needed, however, were more basic English materials: 'I'm not used to using all these fancy different words', they said (B, 92).

Their verdict on their learning was that it was a good idea, principally for two reasons. The first was the need for upskilling. They recognised that their 'work environment changes, people's standards change, [and] that means ... you need to upgrade your customer service and how you deal with customers' (E, 205). The second was for developing transferable skills. They believed that their learning was 'a fantastic opportunity ... because there's obviously a lot of jobs in different industries that don't provide any training past what's actually required for a specific task, and so for a company ... to offer it to you is great and especially when it is transferable across industries and different jobs' (E, 205).

What was illuminating was their view of the TAFE practitioners as external agents. While others cited in this report may have perceived them as virtually one of the company's number, the learners saw it quite differently: 'I don't necessarily see them as part of [the company], I see them as an external coming into [the company] and providing that learning and training for us' (E, learner G, 202).

This external positioning was not a problem for the three learners interviewed at this site, as it provided both wider perspective and certificate portability.

I find it quite refreshing. And I also think, because I think a lot of them have communication with other various sites and then that feeds back to us as well, that it's quite good, because we don't often get feedback from other locations and how they do procedures or best practice things or anything like that, and so I think it's quite good because we get more feedback that way, and it's more consistent. (E, learner G, 202)

Probably better for someone from outside to do it. You can't know everything here at [the company], things do change outside [the company] ... so you do need someone who is sort of more aware of what's happening in the ... real world just to teach you the stuff that you need to know beyond [the company]. (E, learner T, 208)

It's also good because it is a separate certificate, so if we do leave here, we've still got that—we still have that certificate, so we've got something. (E, learner C, 202)

There was one further advantage, that of maintaining a modicum of formality in the learning process that encouraged them to take their studies more seriously.

I have a fine relationship with both of them. It is an informal relationship, but then the fact that they are not part of [the company] keeps that little bit of formality between a teacher and a student ... because otherwise you might not take it as seriously and you'll just think, oh, it's just this person preaching to me, trying to tell me how to do my job. (E, learner G, 207)

Yeah, I was just like what [my colleague] was saying, it just adds a bit more formality to it. I think it's a bit easier sometimes to take information and learning from someone out of the company, take things a bit more seriously ... (E, learner C, 208)

## The enterprise staff view

The enterprise staff claimed there were 'some terrific benefits' in working with TAFE institutes and practitioners (E, 184). One reason was the level of infrastructure available.

... they're massive and they have access to funding and ... profile and all the rest of it that there's no way we could get from a small organisation. They have the infrastructure already in place to create the massive amount of paperwork and blah, blah, blah, everything else that a thing of this size required. (E, 185)

A second reason was the level of preparation demonstrated by the TAFE practitioners. One, for example, equipped himself by working in the company for three months 'so that he could get a really good idea of exactly how does it all work' and, as a result, 'he was able to grasp what I wanted so quickly' and 'really understood what we wanted. And, you know, that's fantastic. I don't think that I've seen that type of dedication to getting something right anywhere else, so that was ... impressive' (E, 184–5). In another instance, the TAFE practitioner became a learner with company employees as a new warehouse management system was being introduced into the enterprise, and was then able to serve as the knowledgeable resource person with firsthand experience for others in the company or new staff (F, 234). In addition, he also involved himself with his workplace to the point where he spent a good deal of unpaid out-of-hours time on the site to ensure that he was abreast with the latest industry trends and standards.

A third reason was that particular people in these companies saw outside practitioners as valuable resources. In one case, a TAFE manager could proudly claim about her practitioners that, 'Whenever I've gone out with them to their clients, their clients have been absolutely glowing about their work ...' (D, 157).

## Two examples of culture change

Two instances are worth mentioning in some detail as they are examples of good practice in terms of effecting culture change from situations where there was very little evidence of organised learning in the enterprises. At case study F, previous training was described by the TAFE manager as 'fairly haphazard ... and it just seemed to be that they'd pass the person a book and say, read this, sign off here and it's done'. The TAFE practitioner therefore 'basically set most of it up', and 'now there's accountability: here's some stuff to read, we're going to come back and ask you about it, so you're going to have to ... demonstrate a knowledge of the information we give you rather than just throw it in the bin and say I've done that' (F, 232). This positive view was shared by the company member, who focused more on the development of his staff and highlighted the culture change in his company.

I think in the last three years, there's really been a focus on improving those people ... which we've seen, and people reach management ... and that's terrific. You still need the guys on the floor that just want to come in and do their nine to five, that's great, but to see a couple of them aspire and achieve, it's created a different feeling out on the floor; like, hey, we're just not down there, we can get up there. And I think this training ... shows some sort of commitment to, hey, we'd like to help you. I think it's ... a culture change as well.

(F, company member, 254)

The TAFE practitioner's analysis of the situation was as follows.

... one of the things I've found is that they will have a situation where they'll employ somebody that's got a forklift licence because that's what part of their job is, but I've found in the past that there's no structured learning as such. I think this was the start of it where they ... needed to know where their staff was as far as skills level, understanding of company policy etc., and I think what we've been doing with this program is starting to help them identify where their structure is and what they need to do as far as training's concerned.

(F, TAFE practitioner, 239)

In case study E, there was the admission by the company staff that training, prior to TAFE coming into the company, was not being done because, either it was not perceived as core business for managers, or they just did not have the time available.

... they really value [the TAFE practitioners] and feel very much that they've been freed up a bit, because frankly, managers doing training is something that falls to the bottom of their list of priorities always. So it just basically wasn't getting done, so they feel that they've been freed up and you know, now someone else is there looking after my staff on a daily basis and ... people who are more qualified to do it than themselves, frankly, and they just love that.

(E, 186)

Thus any learning taking place had been a 'sitting alongside Nellie' experience, described as 'more of a buddy system, so you'd actually be on shift with someone experienced and just learning from them ... Yeah, quite informal' (E, on-the-job learner, 200). Now, there is a lot of on-the-job training, working through modules and assessing on the job, and nearly every staff member is involved, despite only about half of them attracting funding and the company paying for the other half.

The only staff that aren't involved are the very casual staff that are just not doing the hours and we don't have the investment in them because they don't have the investment in us. Other than that, everyone is on board. ... Only about half the staff ... are actually attracting funding, the other half we're paying for them to go through with the excess money. And it needed to be that way, we didn't want a two class system. That was the first concern, and secondly, we can't achieve a culture change if we don't have big numbers in this thing. And I felt, you know, initially when I was saying let's keep it small and controllable, we weren't talking about a culture change then, we were talking about having a great little nifty training system in place that our top key staff could be in. And it quickly became apparent that we had something far bigger than that.

(E, company member, 185)

Thus the 'little nifty training system' had grown beyond expectation and been transformed into a process of culture change.

...within a year we have more than a vision, we have an actuality, and you know that's been absolutely enormous. Sometimes I feel that people don't understand quite how profound that is and quite what a difference that can make to our business. We've just come fourth in the employer of the year category for the [state] training awards, and I'm ecstatic about it, but I don't honestly think that the people here realise what that means and that six months ago we wouldn't have even come in the top one hundred. So it's a dramatic improvement.

(E, company member, 190)

Concerning its effectiveness, the company member claimed that she heard nothing but favourable feedback from all quarters.

In terms of, I guess, the softer sort of feedback, certainly I hear from staff: 'I love it', 'I love being involved in it', 'It's great', 'We feel valued', and 'Finally [the company] is sort of putting something into our training and development etc. From managers I hear: 'It's great having trainers at site'. We're doing about 280 hours a week of face-to-face training. And that's an enormous amount of training when you consider six or eight months ago we had no training going on at the site. There was just a little bit that was in-house, run by managers or site trainers, so you know that's a big step up in suddenly having very qualified and very competent people working side by side with staff while they're actually on shift. So it's quite meaningful ...

(E, company member, 182)

This positive judgement was supported by the TAFE practitioner.

Yes, Yes, I would like to say that I'm totally committed to this particular project, this training project. I have seen a change in staff, more so the staff that I work directly with, that I train, and some of those changes actually include their confidence levels, their ability to work directly with people. And I guess the work morale—I just find that when staff are together for

a training session, it tends to be very laid back, they feel laid back, I can sense that they're feeling comfortable with this whole idea. It just creates a nice atmosphere in the workplace ... I'm certainly looking forward to seeing a whole lot more results come out of this. But I think certainly it's a fantastic project and one that I'm proud to be part of, too.

(E, TAFE practitioner, 218)

## Perceived effectiveness of the TAFE practitioners

Numerical data from the interviews on the TAFE practitioners' influence are provided in the tables in appendix D. While they themselves had rated their knowledge of the enterprises lower than any of the other interviewees (table 4), it was a completely different matter in terms of learning where they rated their influence more highly than any of the others (table 7); they were clearly far more confident about their influence on matters relating to content of learning, the way learning is organised and pace of the learning. There was also consistency in these ratings within each case study, although once again, TAFE interviewees had higher opinions of the practitioners' influence on learning than did industry personnel. The TAFE interviewees' views on the practitioners' influence on the internal workings of the enterprises were quite low, which is not surprising given their outsider status (table 9, appendix D).

Given that effectiveness of the TAFE practitioners' ways of working was one of the objectives of this study, the data from all of the interviewees on the four aspects of delivering, facilitating, assessing and coaching are presented in table 2. (Other aspects of their role are presented in table 10 in appendix D, since only the TAFE interviewees were asked about those aspects in the interests of keeping industry interviews to a minimum time.)

**Table 2: Ratings of participants on the effectiveness of the TAFE practitioners in carrying out aspects of their role within the enterprises**

Case studies	A	B	C	D	E	F	Mean
Delivering training:							
TAFE practitioner	4	5	4	5	5	4	4.50
TAFE manager	3.5	-	5	5	4	5	4.50
Company staff	5	5	5	5	4	4	4.67
Company learners	4	5	-	5	4	-	4.50
Facilitating learning:							
TAFE practitioner	4	5	4	5	5	4	4.50
TAFE manager	3.5	-	5	5	4	5	4.50
Company staff	5	5	5	5	4	4	4.67
Company learners	3	5	-	5	4	-	4.25
Assessing learning:							
TAFE practitioner	5	5	5	4	5	4.5	4.75
TAFE manager	4.5	-	5	5	4	5	4.70
Company staff	5	5	5	5	4	4.5	4.75
Company learners	4	4	-	5	4	-	4.25
Coaching learners:							
TAFE practitioner	4	5	4	5	5	3.5	4.42
TAFE manager	4.5	-	3	5	4	5	4.30
Company staff	5	5	5	5	4	4.5	4.75
Company learners	3	5	-	5	5	-	4.50

Note: 5 = very; 4 = considerably; 3 = to some extent; 2 = slightly; 1 = not really at all

There are two important aspects to notice in these data on effectiveness. First, ratings from all interviewees were very high, with means of 4.25 or higher on all of these core functions. They were

particularly high on assessing learning. The work of the TAFE practitioners was clearly appreciated by all concerned (and the ratings for the other aspects of their role given in table 10 are similarly high, giving a consistency to this picture). Second, the pattern thus far of TAFE interviewees rating the TAFE practitioners more highly than industry interviewees evident in the data on influence was significantly reversed in these data on effectiveness. In all four instances, enterprise members rated the practitioner most highly, and in two cases (delivery and coaching), the learners rated second most highly. It is evident that the TAFE practitioners are particularly appreciated by their counterparts in training within each of the companies, and their numerical ratings resonate with the favourable tenor of their interview texts. These results are certainly a significant pat on the back for the ways in which these TAFE practitioners worked in the enterprises.

In terms of what helped the TAFE practitioners most in their work, three key themes emerged from the interviews (table 11, appendix E). One was supportive company relationships. The second was their industrial background—their knowledge of industry, and in some cases, of the company, was often commented upon favourably by interviewees. And the third was their personal attributes, which included such characteristics as enthusiasm, passion, knowledge of own strengths, credibility, ability to impart knowledge, honest relationships, thoroughness and patience and willingness to accept company imperatives and to accommodate to learners' different expectations. Hindrances to the TAFE practitioners' work also could be grouped into three main categories (table 12, appendix E). By far the most common was perceived to be difficulties with the on-the-job learners, and these included negative attitudes to learning, their workloads and most critically, problems in their availability for learning activities. The second category was bureaucratic procedures in order to be compliant, while the third was a cluster of factors relating to time, funding, resources and facilities.

A number of suggestions were offered by interviewees for minimising these hindrances and for making the TAFE practitioners' role more effective (table 13, appendix E). These ranged from overcoming negative company perceptions of TAFE and ensuring that the most appropriate people in TAFE are employed in these arrangements with industry (for example, some features mentioned by company personnel included current knowledge of industry and the company, use of interactive methodologies and valuing the knowledge of on-the-job learners), to better resources, less paperwork, clearer training plans within companies, rethinking ways in which on-the-job learners might be more easily made available for learning activity, and instilling greater commitment to learning in workers.



# Conclusions

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This research has investigated how TAFE practitioners work with and within enterprises, and analysed the perceptions of these ways of working held by TAFE practitioners, their managers, company members and on-the-job learners. It has also evaluated, through the perceptions of these four types of participants, the effectiveness of these ways of working.

What this study has shown is that, while in these companies there were traces of vertical and self-initiated learning systems already in place, they had been haphazard, informal, relatively unsupported and therefore ineffectual; hence the desire to develop links with an external agent to make training available that was nationally accredited, to provide specialist training and assessment expertise, and to fill a vacuum that those within companies did not necessarily have time to fill, or believed was not their core business.

Thus, from the perspective of learning network theory, in each of these case studies an external learning system was being introduced which was superimposed upon existing learning systems, or, as in one of the cases, where collaborative teamwork was established, with the in-house system being enthusiastically driven by the training manager. While there were tensions in such overlay, and it took time and energy to resolve difficulties and minimise hindrances, the interview data from this study—both the qualitative judgements and the more quantitative ratings of influence and effectiveness—from four different types of participants indicate that the ways of working of these external training providers were positively received and contributed significantly to improved learning within these enterprises.

## Ways of working

From analysis of the interview texts in this study, the TAFE practitioners' ways of working with enterprises may be most appropriately summarised in six roles.

### Bearers of glad tidings

The TAFE practitioners injected new dimensions into the learning networks of companies. In some cases, this involved establishing training on different foundations. In one instance, the training had been 'fairly haphazard' and the TAFE practitioner had come in to 'basically set most of it up' (F, 232); in two other cases it had been a buddy system only; in another case it had been non-accredited, and in another, training did not happen because the managers just did not find the time for 'something that falls to the bottom of their list of priorities' (E, 186). In all of these scenarios, TAFE practitioners had been able to introduce systems that strengthened learning within those companies.

### Raisers of standards

The TAFE practitioners were acknowledged as the training specialists (cf. Dumbrell 2003, p.2). As such, they introduced more theoretical training; they were seen to have knowledge about training packages, which were relatively novel and not understood by many in the enterprises; they sharpened assessment criteria and processes (a key activity); they made training more accountable; they developed standard operating procedures which could then form the basis of much of their

training; they commanded an air of formality as outsiders and therefore at a slight distance, which lent a greater seriousness to the training; they widened the scope of the learning by bringing in new ideas from industry in general, observing how aspects might be done in different ways, and identifying gaps that could be otherwise easily missed by those within closer proximity and with greater familiarity with everyday, routine experience; they added to the content specified in training packages in order to meet company needs and lift standards; and they were judged by company personnel to be good at getting their messages across and in clearly explaining procedures.

## Builders of learning culture

The TAFE practitioners were not simply content trainers brought into companies to fulfil a need for skills inculcation, although in some cases this did appear to be the expectation initially (for example, for occupational health and safety or customer service competencies). Most of them, at least after the initial stages of plugging learning gaps, came to perceive their mission in far broader terms—as changing the learning cultures of the enterprises in which they worked. This was acknowledged not only by the TAFE practitioners themselves but, significantly, also by the company staff. One company member spoke about the ‘focus on improving ... people ... it’s ... a culture change as well’ (F, company contact, 254), while another claimed, ‘We’re just shifting our culture and moving it all the time’ (B, 80). In another case, the TAFE practitioner acknowledged that there was ‘an emphasis on improving the learning culture of the company’ (E, 212).

## Coaches of learning

These TAFE practitioners were not simply trainers or teachers supplementing already existing company trainers. If that had been all there were to the arrangement, there would not have been much point and they might have well done this themselves. Their role was more to add value. They often worked with people on a one-to-one basis, as distinct from teaching in classroom-type situations to which they were more accustomed (in this respect, some were told not to ‘lift your game but change your game’, E, 197). This style could more aptly be labelled ‘a learning coach’, where the practitioner displayed ‘a real coaching way of teaching’ and was ‘passionate about developing people’ (B, 81). Coaching (cf. Field & Mawer 1998) was often described by the practitioners themselves as the aspect of their role that they were best at—‘Oh! that’s my forte’ (B, 99). This was even recognised by others: ‘That’s probably one of his better talents’ (F, TAFE manager, 233); ‘Very strong, they’re her strengths’ (B, company member, 81), and:

One of [the TAFE practitioner’s] better qualities is the coaching side of things ... he certainly can put people at ease and get them to understand, well, you still need to pick up in this area and these are some of the things you can do, he’s actually very good one on one. And most the stuff he does is one on one ... (A, company member, 40)

## Bridges between TAFE and industry

The TAFE practitioners served as bridges between the public VET system and private industry. As such, they were links between quite markedly different cultures, where there was the potential ‘to help and learn from each other’, with one being ‘more businesslike’ and the other being less preoccupied ‘about the money’ (E, 226). In that sense, they were representatives of the middle ground, the ‘meat in the sandwich’ (A, 51), a role that only they could play because of their unique backgrounds and experiences. They were people who were often thought of as one of the company staff, as having a closer fit with industrial culture than with TAFE culture, even though they now worked for the public sector. They had left one sector (in five cases industry and in one case TAFE) and ‘defected’ to the other side, and in this position of having experienced both cultures, were uniquely fitted to the roles they were now playing—and, according to the actors in all these case studies, were playing effectively.

## Models of learning

While the TAFE practitioners were hired into companies as training specialists, they also served as examples of learners to their own on-the-job learners. One participated in company training on a new warehouse management system and thereby became sufficiently knowledgeable to help others; in addition, he spent a considerable amount of unpaid, out-of-hours time in the enterprise to ensure that he kept abreast with the latest industry trends and standards. Another worked in the company for three months first to understand how it worked, while yet another familiarised herself with ‘training needs analyses ... before I did any planning’ (B, 94). In this way, they not only won the respect and credibility of their clients, but more importantly from a long-term perspective, they modelled lifelong learning, the need to be in ‘a continual learning process’ (F, 241), even if inadvertently, they, as the training specialists, were illustrating to the ‘doubting Thomases’ and ‘reluctant learners’ within the companies the importance of learning, and thereby furthering their loftier mission of building more durable learning cultures within those enterprises.

## ‘A huge learning curve’

The ways of working of the TAFE practitioners, however, were not unproblematic. These external training providers had much other learning to do, something most had not necessarily appreciated when they first started working with the enterprises. Their learning had to be far deeper and more subtle than merely learning about company processes, employee gaps and training content. These were certainly important in order to be visibly effective and to win credibility, otherwise people would ‘vote with their feet’ (C, 107). But what did they really have to learn? Some examples of the learning that they had to undergo were:

- ✧ about company culture and environment—it was such unknown territory’ (E, 185) and ‘the biggest thing was to try and get to know their environment’ (F, 237). One company member proclaimed: ‘You can’t just come in and plug in a program ... you have to understand the culture ... from a workplace culture point of view’ (B, 80)
- ✧ that it took time—to win friends and influence people, to sell their wares to initially resistant and sceptical workers, and to plug learning gaps before beginning to build a broader learning culture; one TAFE practitioner was hardly ever at his institute: ‘In the last two or three years, I haven’t had much involvement there, ... I’ve really just been chasing my tail, just to try and keep the venues happy’ (D, 161)
- ✧ that it took energy—one TAFE manager complained that she had ‘more than half of my body into this program and I really need to pull myself out’ (E, 228)
- ✧ that timing of learning episodes was not necessarily of their own making—availability of workers for learning was cited as a ‘hindrance’ by almost every interviewee, highlighting the difficulty in an industrial environment
- ✧ that many on-the-job learners were reluctant/resistant—their attitudes to learning were described variously as not ‘that flash’ (F, 250), ‘not always keen’ (D, 152) and ‘not always exactly knocking on the door’ (D, 152)
- ✧ to be flexible; for example, ‘We do that in a flexible learning mode where we identify the gaps in the training and fill in those gaps and it works on a flexible arrangement ... so we’re forever chopping and changing ..., mainly to fit in with the company and to limit the downtime’ (F, 231)
- ✧ to be patient—meet immediate needs first, initially plugging gaps, then moving onto a broader mission; ‘just having the patience with people ... having an understanding of people’s roles within the company, I try to learn that, and also their expectations and trying to understand a person, whether they want to go any further than what they are, or whether they’ve got expectations to become a manager’ (F, 245)
- ✧ to change their methodologies to fit with the ‘in your face’ (E, 196) environment of industry—to be less lecturer and classroom-like, and more interactive

- ✧ to customise their materials to correspond more closely with the industry environment and to meet client needs, not walking into enterprises with pre-packaged content, ‘because if we can’t meet what they need, well, what we’re doing is a waste of time. I think that is where it’s taken three years for us to learn that that’s the secret’ (D, 166)
- ✧ to listen to enterprise staff on company-specific matters in order to become more relevant—‘that’s the sort of the perception if you listen to the people’ (A, 46).

It is important to recognise that the learning was not all on one side. Company personnel also had much learning to do. For example, senior managers had to learn that training had potential as investment and that accredited training was valuable in this age of government policy and increasing competition in the marketplace; middle managers had to learn patience with the TAFE system, particularly the bureaucratic procedures and amount of paperwork; and on-the-job learners had to come to a realisation that learning towards the gaining of a certificate or assessment for recognising their current competencies were worthwhile.

Thus, the experience on all fronts was a steep ‘learning curve’. It is significant that this exact phrase was explicitly mentioned (unsolicited) five times in interviews for this study—across three case studies and by three different people—and it was implied a great many more times, as, for example, in referring to a ‘learning process’ or a ‘learning experience’. It is illuminating to observe that this expression had several layers of meaning. One layer was the learning that had to take place between managers and workers. A TAFE practitioner observed: ‘The company’s got to learn to say what safety equipment they need to be able to do the job as well, so it’s a learning curve from both sides, both from the workers themselves and the employer’ (F, 239).

Another layer of meaning was the continuous learning that this TAFE practitioner believed management had come to expect from their workers.

... there’s been a very big change in learning, and I think that the company has identified a requirement for their staff to be on a learning curve all the time. I don’t think it’s a matter of, because that person knows how to do the job, there is no requirement now for the next ten years to not have to retrain or something like that. I think that’s pointed out very markedly.

(F, 240)

More directly related to the focus of this research, a third layer referred to the learning that TAFE practitioners had to undertake in adjusting to enterprise environments. In one instance, the company member did not consider that the TAFE practitioner had had to go through such a change as others, since he already had considerable experience in that very company: ‘He didn’t have that big learning curve when he first walked in to deliver training because he already had that knowledge, so it’s easier for him to keep up-to-date with what’s going on’ (A, 38). In contrast, however, another company member judged that one of the main difficulties for the TAFE practitioners engaging with her company was ‘the learning curve, ... that it was just very different work to what they’d done before ... I imagine that the TAFE people sometimes feel their hair standing on end about the way that we do things around here (E, 189).

And a fourth layer of meaning was the flipside of the TAFE practitioners’ learning, namely, the learning that the company members underwent during the changes referred to in this research. It is fitting, therefore, that the last voice should come from this same company member who acknowledged that the experience of the partnership had been a learning curve on both sides. She spoke with reference to herself.

It’s been a huge learning curve for me, like ... I’ve never worked in anything like that before and ... whilst I was an old operations manager, I was a new [company member], and I didn’t really have a clue about anything about training when I came into the job. I just knew what we needed to ... do, but I didn’t particularly know how we were going to do that ... so ... within a year, we have more than a vision, we have an actuality, and you know that’s been absolutely

enormous. Sometimes I feel that people don't understand quite how profound that is and quite what a difference that can make to our business ... it's a dramatic improvement. (E, 190)

## Implications

So what are the implications of this research for TAFE practitioners' ways of working with private enterprise? The findings from this research suggest the following.

### Implications for TAFE managers and practitioners

#### *Understanding how work is undertaken and managed in an enterprise*

In planning learning goals and strategies with enterprises, TAFE managers and practitioners need to take the time to develop a sound understanding of how a particular enterprise operates and how work is undertaken and managed within it. Learning goals and strategies need to be developed so that they take advantage of the work processes and practices best suited to support the types of learning being undertaken in the enterprise. Taking time to understand when it might be a 'good' time for learning (for example, when production pressures are less) is an important strategy for promoting the conditions under which learning might be successfully undertaken. Conversely, understanding what times, events and processes are not well suited to learning needs to be taken into account.

TAFE managers and practitioners, with their 'outsider' knowledge and perspectives, may be in a uniquely fresh position to offer advice and support to managers/owners wanting to enhance the potential for learning within their enterprises. This will have implications for the understanding that TAFE managers and practitioners need to hold in areas such as industrial relations and human resource development, as well as industry-specific knowledge and skills.

#### *Recognising that work shapes learning*

Learning, although important, is not usually the core business of enterprises. As such, working with an enterprise requires careful and sensitive management, including the development and implementation of learning goals and strategies best able to meld in with the core business of the enterprise. In other words, the work of the enterprise shapes learning—learning does not shape the work.

TAFE managers and practitioners need to recognise that work networks will always have priority over learning networks in workplaces, and thus practitioners' ways of working must always take account of the natural flow and pattern of the enterprise's work. Needs-based, just-in-time and highly interactive training and learning strategies are highly valued approaches to facilitating learning in enterprise-based environments.

#### *Understanding tensions between different types of learning within enterprises*

TAFE managers and practitioners need to appreciate that there will inevitably be tensions between the various types of learning systems within enterprises, and in particular, between what the practitioners intend to do and what already exists (however rudimentary that might be). For example, differences will need to be appropriately managed between the 'external' system (where learning is driven from outside the enterprise) and the 'vertical' system (where learning is underpinned by structural supports within the enterprise) over issues related to methodology, focus and assessment, or between the external system and the self-initiated system (where learning is organised by the learners themselves) over competing commitments or time.

There are many places and ways in which learning can take place in enterprises in addition to those organised formally by management or external consultants. Informal learning, such as occurs as

people work alongside colleagues, converse during meetings and share over lunch is ubiquitous. Sometimes this informal learning can conflict with what might be emphasised in formal training programs within the workplace, or that which is offered by outside consultants such as TAFE or as set out in a training package. Sometimes learning is initiated by workers themselves and this may be in conflict with the training that the enterprises require them to undertake. Managing learning within enterprises inevitably demands that tensions between these various ways of learning and the content/outcomes of this learning be addressed sensitively and skilfully. Arguably, learning is most effective when facilitators are able to 'tap into' the informal learning that occurs in enterprises and render this more visible (and therefore assessable). Contextualisation and customisation of learning pathways make important contributions to harnessing this informal learning, enabling the development of relevant and authentic learning opportunities within enterprises. This in turn requires that TAFE practitioners who work in enterprises have in-depth knowledge of training packages and their applications.

### *Recognising there are various groups with interests in learning, and they are 'outsiders'*

TAFE managers and practitioners need to recognise that TAFE practitioners are just one group of actors within companies' learning networks, and that they are unlike other actors, in that they are not also embedded within work networks (that is, they are not a formal component of the company's workforce, with all implied by this). TAFE practitioners are one of a number of groups who may have an interest in the type of learning facilitated within an enterprise. Others include management, workers, industry associations and other professional bodies, as well as suppliers. Unlike management and workers, however, they are positioned 'outside' the enterprise's structures and thus need to be able to negotiate a position and ways of working that take into account the political and decision-making networks and influences operating within the enterprise.

Understanding the external environment in which an enterprise operates, as well as the internal dynamics of the enterprise, will go some way towards enabling TAFE practitioners to work as effectively as possible within this changing environment. This has implications for the level of communication, negotiation and conflict resolution skills required by practitioners, as well as a clear understanding of the parameters in which they are contracted by TAFE to work with enterprises.

### *Accepting that TAFE practitioners in enterprises work within different parameters*

TAFE managers and practitioners need to acknowledge that practitioners will be spending considerable time away from the institute and will therefore be under less institute supervision and control; that such practitioners are positioned somewhere between institute and enterprise with divided commitments, time and even loyalties. TAFE managers need to accept that practitioners in enterprises work within a very different set of parameters from those of their colleagues who are primarily located in institutions. The nature of their work can also be quite different.

This has numerous human resource and industrial relations implications. For example, the ways in which TAFE practitioners' work is counted (for example, contact hours may no longer be a suitable measure of activity), how accountability and key performance indicators are framed and monitored, and the degree of autonomy afforded to staff in decision-making, are all critical issues that need to be addressed if suitable working conditions for practitioners are to be provided.

## Implications for both TAFE staff and company members

### *Acknowledging and accommodating differences between enterprises and institutes*

There are considerable differences in purposes, structures and cultures, and perceptions of such differences between TAFE institutes and private enterprises. Perceptions that each type of organisation has of the other are often based partly in fact and partly in myth. Establishing workable

and effective linkages between enterprises and institutes necessarily requires that these differences be openly acknowledged and, as far as possible, understood and accommodated or dismissed.

Practical ways in which this understanding can be developed need to be explored and developed, and could include such strategies as staff exchanges (where practicable), engagement of all relevant stakeholders as early as possible in development of linkages, use of third parties or intermediaries to facilitate development of partnerships (thus limiting the potential for one to dominate the other), TAFE undertaking small-scale *pro bono* activities to alert enterprises not used to working with TAFE to the possibilities and potential advantages of such linkages, and development of smaller-scale projects to 'test the water' before more substantial commitments are made.

### *Allowing time for establishing effective linkages*

Establishing effective linkages takes considerable time and energy for TAFE practitioners to become accepted into and trusted within enterprise environments. Realistic timelines for such ventures are vital.

### *Recognising that both private and public sectors need each other*

Both public and private sectors need each other. In the most basic sense, companies want accredited training and its accompanying certificates; TAFE seeks the extra money to supplement its government funding. At a more subtle level, each party has strengths that the other does not have. For example, TAFE practitioners have training expertise, understandings about learning processes and knowledge of the complexities of the national training framework, while enterprise staff have knowledge of company context, company learning histories and understanding of needs and personnel.

### *Acknowledging that partnerships require mutual commitment and that both can derive benefit*

It is not possible to establish perfectly equal partnerships. Some imbalance in power, resources and knowledge is inevitable. Partnerships need to be built upon acknowledgement that, while partners may well be unequal in relation to knowledge, resources and power, there is the expectation of commitment, and that each partner will derive benefit from the compact. Some building blocks for effective partnerships could include the following:

- ✧ promotion: the fostering of learning as an end in itself that is of value to all stakeholders, not just the institutions involved
- ✧ consultation: policy development and implementation undertaken with genuine consultation within and across organisations
- ✧ funding: sustainable resource allocation by both parties
- ✧ coordination: both within the enterprise and the TAFE institution (including interdepartmental coordination), as well as between the enterprise and TAFE
- ✧ monitoring: of the health of partnerships, so that proactive steps can be taken to maintain effective relationships rather than having to deal with problems in a reactive manner.

### *Recognising that effective linkages demand considerable new learning*

The process of forming effective linkages demands considerable new learning for both TAFE practitioners and company members (as highlighted above), but given goodwill and perseverance, 'both help and learn from each other' (E, 226) through such 'a huge learning curve' (E, 190).

### *Considering good practice ways of working highlighted in this report*

There are a number of good-practice ways of working discussed in this report that are worthy of serious consideration; for example, selecting the 'right' people (in terms of ability, attitude and personality) for such collaborative linkages; becoming quickly familiar with enterprise environment, culture and networks; having or developing important skills such as 'sussing out' what is required, identifying skill deficits and 'topping up', and being able to tune in with the flow of enterprise work; working collaboratively in teams of TAFE and enterprise staff; and sensitively customising methods and materials.

### *Implications for policy-makers*

#### *Recognising the new and different space being created between public and private sectors*

TAFE practitioners are carving out a new and qualitatively different space between institutes and enterprises, between the world of learning and the world of work, and between the public sector and the private sector. This needs to be acknowledged and accommodated in relevant policies and processes (such as in the human resources area), as well as in programs of initial teacher preparation, induction and ongoing professional development.

#### *Dealing with perceptions about policies and practices that work against effective linkages*

There is still much work to be done in dealing with perceptions, in both enterprises and providers, that policy is continually changing, therefore frustrating and not currently supporting providers to deliver quality training in industry; that demanding paperwork and bureaucratic procedures are counter-productive; that communications between employers, learners, TAFE and New Apprenticeships Centres can be problematic; and that enterprises using external providers for their training can readily fall into the habit of leaving it all to the provider and absolving themselves of responsibility.

#### *Further educating about how to use training packages creatively*

There is still much work to be done in educating both enterprises and TAFE practitioners in the creative use of training packages to meet the needs of enterprises for skilled staff more effectively. The key issue of contextualising and customising learning pathways, while at the same time preserving the integrity of national qualifications, articulation and learning progression for learners, is of critical importance.

#### *Ameliorating negative perceptions of TAFE in industry*

There is still much work to be done in industry in ameliorating negative perceptions of TAFE. However, research into and publicising the effectiveness of examples of linkages such as those in this study can go a long way towards furthering the climate of trust, cooperation and appreciation between industry and training providers.



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# Support document details

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Additional information relating to this research is available in '*A huge learning curve: TAFE practitioners' ways of working with private enterprises—Support document*'. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>. The document contains:

- ✧ Appendix A: Literature review
- ✧ Appendix B: Interview schedules
- ✧ Appendix C: The six case studies
- ✧ Appendix D: Tables of interview data
- ✧ Appendix E: Helps, hindrances and strategies



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